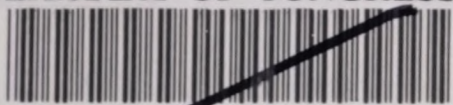


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Herbert Severance

BY

M. FRENCH-SHELDON.

RAND, McNALLY & COMPANY,
CHICAGO AND NEW YORK.

HERBERT SEVERANCE.

“It is a great *sin* to swear unto a *sin*,
But greater *sin* to keep a sinful oath.”





Titled "Souvenir," this picture told a suggestive story.—Page 15.

HERBERT SEVERANCE.

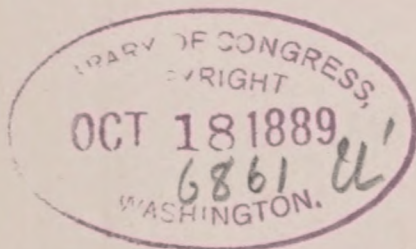
A Novel

BY

M. FRENCH-SHELDON. ✓

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CHICAGO AND NEW YORK:

RAND, McNALLY & COMPANY, PUBLISHERS.

1889.

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Severance.

Inscribed

TO

JULIA T. LINTHICUM,

A TRUE, BRAVE, SYMPATHETIC, CHIVALRIC WOMAN,

AND MY STERLING FRIEND.

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HERBERT SEVERANCE.

CHAPTER I.

MAN AND MAN.

“Come, fate, into the lists,
And champion me to the utterance.”

“’**P**ON honour, my youthful enthusiast, you are well embarked for a good gulling ! Learn to discriminate, to coolly analyse, to pluck apart, shred by shred, every fibre of society ; then, not till then, will you arrive at an ultimate conclusion worth consideration. Mark you, Dick, I say an ultimate conclusion, unswayed by the meretricious deductions of a mere impressionist.”

Ending his good-natured thrust with just a spice of irony, Herbert Severance, a solid man of means and flesh, a lawyer by profession, settled back into the depths of his well-cushioned easy-chair, and proceeded to scan, insinuatingly, his caller, who was his nephew.

The younger man was considerably discomfited by having his uncle throw such a damper upon a

proposition which he had uttered,—a proposition, according to his uncle's presumption, that was doubtless born of an infatuation, deficient in common sense.

Undaunted, Richard Drysdale resumed the subject his uncle had interrupted to deliver his homily and attack — resumed it, too, with a degree of vigorous spirit, much as might a wrestler of stamina, after having been tripped and badly thrown by an adversary of no better metal than himself, gird his belt a bit snugger, settle back upon his nerve, and renew the struggle with feet more firmly planted.

“Hold, uncle; not so rapid. This affair of which I speak has nothing whatever to do with my ‘discrimination.’ It has none of the insolence of my personal opinion, or, as you are apt to contemptuously say, of my ‘fads.’ I merely repeat to you the unanimous decree of every critic, who has thus far heard and passed judgment upon the genius of my—my—” He stammered.

“‘*Protégée*, Dick, that’s the word, my boy, ’tis patent to such folly!” interjected the uncle, half satirically.

“Very well, so be it, ‘*my protégée*.’ I reiterate, every critic with marked singleness avers that she possesses gifts that insure her a glorious future, *if* properly trained; while her voice is flexible and unalloyed—and—”

A distressing hesitancy seemed to make the young man’s tongue cling to the unuttered words, as though reluctant to part with the precious sentiment they embodied.

Herbert Severance, with a merry, teasing twinkle in his keen alert eyes, looked his nephew fair and square in the face.

"Ha! ha! ha! Dick," he broke out in a gay, provoking laugh, "my dear boy, don't hedge, 'tis the old, old story, eh?" Then suddenly curbing his outburst, he continued with extreme gravity: "Have I brought you up through all these years, based my pride and hope on you, Dick, only to have you lose your head, and mortgage your heart on an itinerant mummer's daughter? And you, a young fellow, are fool enough, in your blind infatuation, to see no impropriety in taking under your auspices a young girl! What sort can she be? And you even ask me to sanction a course by which you will squander away your substance, and wreck your future on *such an one!*"

At these words a quiver flitted over Richard Drysdale's face, but his uncle in his present denunciatory mood paused not.

"Alas, Dick, I hoped for far better and nobler results. In truth, I dreamed of one fair woman, who should make captive your passionate, impulsive, generous heart—a woman fair, a woman fine, a woman all in all you could feel was worth an entire life-time of absolute, unalterable devotion; but, instigated by folly, you have disappointed all dreams, just at the time when I hoped they were to be soon realised, by falling heels-over-head in love with an incipient *nobody-knows-who-singer!*"

Richard Drysdale sprang forward as one sud-

denly and unexpectedly stabbed in the back, and held up his hands admonishingly. A flashing rebuke darted from his green-grey eyes, needing no words to interpret.

"Uncle, stop! say not one word more!" he said, as he moved towards the door; "you are profaning recklessly, and in unwonted terms, the name of a lovely, pure girl, whom, if compromised, unwittingly, by me—well, I *shall marry*, if needs be, *this very night*. Thereby, sir, you will admit I can secure the right of championship in her defence, without sullyng her spotless name? Good morning! I may be found at the hotel when you are prepared to talk as one rational man should to another—dispassionately—with me. Good morning."

The elder man bounded to his feet. Dazed, yet furious at this announcement, he placed his hand against the door, preventing his nephew from opening it without employing physical force, not consonant to his estate.

A duel of eyes ensued, more murderous, more merciless than an encounter with two-edged swords.

Herbert Severance's eyes glittered as they moved rapidly, eyeing the young man from head to foot, they seemed lurid with sudden wrath, whereas, the nephew's intense green-grey eyes, superbly hostile with repudiating indignation, were fixed unflinchingly upon his uncle, in a regard of determination that knew no quailing. They burned with an incandescent gleam, almost triumphant in

the consciousness of superior strength in right, yet withal tempered by a vague shade of regret.

At heart Dick loved his uncle; but, as a man, because of that reason, he could not brook interference or opprobrium, even from his kin, respecting the woman he loved.

Transformed almost in an instant from chaffing, sportive men—easy in deportment as behoves men in their station of life, gracious and familiar in their attitude to one another—here stood aggressor and defender, full of antagonisms, full of resentments. The affection of years set aside, ties of kin threatened a ruthless sunder, because the blood of youth was over-quick to seethe with exasperation through Richard Drysdale's veins; and the domineering temper of Herbert Severance was too fiery and insistent, to calmly suffer defiance from the young man whom he had fostered and educated from babyhood as his own son. Having been accustomed to exact passive compliance from Dick during the long passage of time between extreme youth and adolescence, he now forgot that the yielding nature of a few years ago had, by an inexorable development, become a type of man—likened even to himself—of great personal reliance, and characteristic, decisive traits, and no longer bent compliantly to his will.

Dick now naturally held it to be his individual right to plan his own future in accordance with the dictates of his own personal election. Their present attitude was as man and man.

Presently, after the lapse of an ambiguous moment, when the reason of both men appeared to stagger, Dick said in a suppressed tone, such a tone as indicated a stress to subdue a war cry :

“Uncle, I beg of you to permit me to depart. I do not wish a stormy scene. I do not wish to wound you as you have wounded me.”

His uncle remained unmoved.

“For God’s sake, uncle, let me pass ere I lose mastery over myself, and am guilty of an act for which, out of the heat of anger, I should repent !” blurted Dick, impetuously.

Still Herbert Severance remained motionless, his hand pressed even firmer against the door, his eyes suffused. He essayed to speak, but his emotion choked back the words before they gained utterance. His lips remained mutely parted. Verily, the struggle within was mighty. A conflict waged between love and tyranny. The crisis, however, was speedily attained.

“Dick, my boy,” he dropped his hand and stood aside, “forgive me. Let me entreat you not to be rash. Come back when we are both calmer, when I shall be myself, and talk it all over with me. One moment, Dick, listen to me. I have had a tragedy in my own life, through a similar affair of sentiment, at about your age, and——well, my dear boy, I cannot possibly see you perhaps stumbling over a precipice into an abyss, without warning you, without striving to check you. Forgive my abrupt, harsh method, Dick, and come back

when we shall both be tranquillized. Then I will unbosom my heart-history to you, which I think you will allow is apology enough for my seeming unreasonable course."

The earnest, pathetic tone of the man, who now pleaded with almost humiliation, so impressed Dick, that he turned about, and extended both hands to his uncle.

"Uncle, I will," he said in a spirit of manly reconciliation. "'Tis all forgotten now. Only, I deem it best to take a turn in the open air before we have a talk. I'll return in half-an-hour."

The young man passed into the hall, took his hat, gloves, and walking-stick, going hastily out of the front door. His present quickness was not, however, the resistless elasticity of his usual exuberant, dashing manner, but, rather, the rapid movement of a soldier ordered with all despatch to the front of an enemy to engage in a pitched battle. He pulled his moustache with his disengaged hand, bit his lips, looked furtively ahead of him in space, struck sharply the ferrule of his walking-stick upon the stone pavement, and sighed now and again as if wearied with his own thoughts.

Suddenly, bethinking himself, he drew out his watch, glancing eagerly at the time. It was past the appointed half hour. He wheeled around, and retraced his steps with renewed impetuosity.

Richard Drysdale was truly an unusual young man, alike in outward appearance and mentality. Delicate to an apparent degree of fragility, which

betokened fineness, not weakness, this appearance was magnified by his compact, slender figure, his medium stature, his fair complexion. His lineaments, taken from a critical point of view, were massive in their inherent qualities. A broad, well-lined forehead indicated thoughtfulness and concentration. His deep, luminous, green-grey eyes, shadowed with long bronze eyelashes, and marked by finely-curved, somewhat profuse eyebrows, seemed to change colour like chameleons. Actually, the thing they looked upon, mentally or objectively, imparted a vivid hue and reflection of itself to their singularly mottled, ciliary lines, and the white of the ball was translucent, opaline—they were at once the eyes of a tiger and the eyes of a dove.

His long, thin nose, with sensitive nostrils, tinged pink on the inner surface, dilated more or less according to the varied play of his emotions. His lips, unfortunately, were partially hidden by a rather abundant, long moustache, like spun golden-bronze, full of shimmering shades, but the lower lip was frequently disclosed, in consequence of his confirmed habit of stroking his Victor Emmanuel moustache upward and outward. It was a full, sensuous, nervous mouth, which, in repose, pressed his gleaming teeth, but in speech, or when overcast by a smile, betrayed a nature teeming with humanity and passionate impulses. And yet, it was firm to a degree of cruel severity.

His chin indicated endurance, faithfulness, and

invincibility; insistence for justice, tyranny for right.

All in all, his features, and the fine, spirited pose of his head, made a combination sufficient to fascinate any girl or woman susceptible to certain indices of manly *distingué* appearances, or to attract any man who might be astute enough to study these delineations of character stamped with such inconcealable force.

Had he an apparent flaw in his *physique*, it was developed during moments of wrapt meditation, when his shoulders would incline slightly forward, as is the wont of all delvers in books, who read to absolute forgetfulness, and with self-abandonment, any absorbing theme.

The cut of his apparel was distinctly *à la mode*. Every *minutia* of his toilet, even to his hat, gloves, shoes, and walking-stick, or umbrella, was precisely patterned to the last edicts of the fickle code of fashion. There was no silly snobbishness in this. Dick, as a man of proprieties, and an observer of good form, refinement, and taste, never essayed eccentricities out of, or in, fashion.

A close observer might almost always notice that there was a protuberance on the left side of his coat over the breast. This, upon investigation, would reveal a certain idiosyncrasy of the young man. He invariably stuffed into this pocket numbers of letters, cards, and "mems.," which he never seemed quite prepared to properly file away or discard. It was one of his oddities to have cer-

tain documents always to hand—a thing his comrades chaffed him considerably about, because the subject-matter of his portable budget was as frequently changed as the direction of his thoughts, or his researches in divers channels.

Possessed of an artistic, appreciative, sympathetic temperament, he was ever and anon engrossed in something or some one, requiring somebody's espousal or championship to bring to light, or afford to such an one the needed opportunity for full development and success. Frequently the fellows at the clubs called him the "*Steam-launch Rescue, towing in a ship in distress.*"

Perish the idea that Richard Drysdale was not a very clear-headed young man, despite his *fads*, never to be dissuaded by specious arguments or partiality out of his own usually very admirable and discriminating judgment.

A super-acute sense of justice was absolutely Dick's bane.

Although a fiery, passionate nature, strung to a high pitch, a perfect hotspur when incensed, the ingenuousness and readiness with which he made concessions, *noblesse oblige*, when once convinced that he had committed a fault, made all his friends adore him.

Although not exactly *sans reproche*—Dick was a man, not a saint—he was fair, square, honest, and true to the marrow of his bones; as punctilious to the rights of his friends and fellow-creatures as he was insistent for his own; exacting in some

things to a degree, often exasperating those who had to do with him, who were perhaps not prone as he to build a foundation, solid and firm, with excessively laborious attention to details, before attempting a superstructure.

Deep down in Dick's nature were unknown quantities not yet tried, utterly unrevealed to himself. Not infrequently during conversation the attrition of thoughts, never thought nor listened to till then uttered, aroused his consciousness to a latent, covert self, that always set him to introspection.

With ill-concealed impatience Herbert Severance awaited his return, and fain would have recalled and cancelled every word or act which had so recently caused pain to the young man, in whom, after all, his own hourly existence was enwrapt. Uneasily he changed from one chair to another. He tried to smoke. The very choicest Havana had no savour, he threw it away not quarter consumed. He took up one after another the daily journals; found them one and all amazingly stupid, devoid of either domestic or foreign news. He fidgeted about the room, looked out of the windows, pulled out his watch a dozen times, and as if to advance events, twisted the stem-winder so often and so tense, that the spring threatened to snap.

"Could it be that Dick has changed his mind?" he thought, half suspicious it might be so.

At last the long anticipated ring of the door bell was a salutary announcement, dispelling all

doubts from the impatient man's mind. He rushed unceremoniously to the door, and had flung it wide open before the servant had time to reach the landing.

"At last, Dick, at last!" exclaimed he. "I thought the time would never pass."

The young man was rather surprised that his uncle should personally admit him.

"Well, uncle," he deferentially lifted his hat in a courteous salute, "you certainly were impatient to have out-raced Jones. I thank you for this mark of attention;" then apologetically, "I am a trifle beyond the time set, but my thoughts were so preoccupying, I out-walked the distance I could possibly cover within half-an-hour. Pardon the breach."

"Come, come, don't mention it, Dick," delighted to have him back; "I, doubtless, would have made the same mistake."

So they chatted as they walked through the hall to the library at the end of it, in a secluded corner of the capacious dwelling. The library door was carefully hidden beneath heavy Eastern portières. These Herbert Severance drew aside, sliding back into the wall the highly polished door. An ideal room in every appointment was revealed, characterized by marked refinement of taste and style.

It was impossible to enter its charmed environs without intuitively experiencing the influence of its pronounced orientalisms. A dreamy, languid silence

prevailed. It was a student's paradise. There was here that rare quality of perfect harmony, and none of that oppressiveness so common in rooms surcharged with what Pope's apt lines signalize :—

“Things neither rare nor fair,
We wonder how the devil they came to be there.”

No jingling of Orient and Occident, no Egyptian loot or Venetian crystal extravagances, no Chinese monstrosities stacked in company with Japanese rarities or Persian enamels, no oddities of bric-à-brac, without significance or subsidiary use, collected from every dusty, musty, out-of-the-way hole and corner in the universe, ticketed beyond mistake with name and value.

There was no crockery strung about the walls, or like bulls' eyes plaqued in velvet, as targets for admiration, giving the room the character of a disorderly pantry.

The armoury aspect which has become such a universal rage in filling up men's special rooms was also absent. Veritably, in this room no decorative blizzard had swept, no antiquarian fiend had disported.

Herbert Severance had travelled widely, and made extensive and valuable collections, which, with a few exceptions, had been in time relegated to museums.

He had always maintained, with the courage of a man of decided opinions, that in his library there should be no old or new-fangled nonsense.

Here, at least, should prevail an air of poetic Orient. Nothing should clash in the harmonious unison of it all, except, perhaps, himself and his books.

Here, he persisted, he never intended to sacrifice his inbred love of an Oriental interior to the bedizened and befaddled lunacies of the modern decorator; spurious as a rule, and too apt to make the distraught beholder feel as if some cyclonic elements had caused an artistic chaos, or that the legitimate denizen had quit his senses.

A halt long enough to reconnoitre would not be amiss, for in this room a mystery is to be divulged—strictly reiterating the words of Herbert Severance, “a tragedy” is here to be disclosed. Strange recitals will break the silence of long years, the follies and foibles of the solid man of sense are to be set forth as a danger signal to youthful Dick. Therefore, it behoves the curious to cast an eye about.

Two Persian lanterns, which served the place of chandeliers, hung quite low at either end of the longish room. Their varied coloured facets stud-ding the metal-work overshot the lights with prismatic gleams. On a richly-carved polished table in a corner near one of the windows was a wrought-brass lamp, evidently used for reading purposes. Fauteuils abounded, luxurious lounging seats, where one naturally sank into rest, enjoying voluptuous comfort midst well-cushioned sides. There was a small, low table conveniently standing

beside almost every seat, upon which heavy books might be supported. Two long work-tables, under the lanterns at either end of the room, were strewn with books, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, and every necessary article for writing. Conspicuous were two very low, long, broad couches, covered with a Persian tapestry that seemed a counterpart of the large centre rug covering the main part of the parqueted floor. Rich hangings of Persian fabrication concealed the enormous book-shelves which serried the wall spaces, and curtained the windows.

Over the mantelpiece hung a damascened censer, and on both sides, upon the shelf, sat two enamelled metal vases, and two or three handsome silver trays, holding metal basins, embellished with filigree and turquoise, used for tobacco and cigars.

Veritable Oriental embroideries served for drop screens, and draped from view the large open fireplace, which was unused at this season of the year. And in the midst of these folds, heavy with gorgeous arabesques massed in silk flosses of rare colours, hung a small oil painting in a wrought-silver frame.

It was a canvas by a celebrated French artist *hors concours* — a picture upon which every one's eyes were instinctively riveted the moment they beheld it. Titled "*Souvenir*," this picture told such a suggestive story, it seemed a pity there was no companion picture to tell the sequel.

With all the spirituelle colouring and ideal con-

ception of a master artist who paints without a flaw, was here depicted a corner of a marble sculptured wall in the garden of Versailles. Just a corner embowered without artifice by the trailing foliage of overtopping trees. On a marble form, close against the wall, sits a lady, her face the Marie Antoinette type. She is costumed in the fashion of the Louis Seize period, her hair coiffured with high puffs, and powdered white; her dress half-mourning; her plumed-hat thrown carelessly to one side upon the inlaid tiles. She sits, her dainty feet shod in very high-heeled slippers, ornamented with diamond buckles, extending beyond her silk petticoat, so crossed that one heel presses upon one ankle, and both toes rest upon the tiles. Her hands are dropped in her lap, the fingers clasped tightly; her head bent forward until her chin presses upon her swelling bosom, her eyes gazing with hazy fixity, entranced by a vision.

Thus the *ci-devant* belle meditates. Her thoughts are made as visible to the beholder, as to her own mind. There against the marble wall, shadowy as a vapour through which the devices on its sculptured surface are descried, appear two figures, notwithstanding their transparency, distinct in themselves.

A woman — the dreamer herself, but much younger then than now—attired in court-ball costume blazing with jewels, stands gazing with a joyous recognition down upon the courtier on his knees at her feet, holding both of her hands, plead-

ing with an unmistakable ardour that is evidently winning his suit. He, too, is in court-ball costume, magnificently adorned. An array of orders and decorations betokens his rank and importance.

The expectancy of an impassioned lover, the responsiveness of the woman wooed, and almost, if not quite, won, make the canvas glow and vibrate with a mysterious life.

The tender delicacy of treatment, the tone, the colour, the *finesse*, the sentiment, are qualities to make this tableau reside for ever indelibly in the memory of one who has been privileged to see it. And yet it leaves the beholder in a provoking wonderment, striving to determine who the woman is,—alone,—dreaming. Why is she dressed in half-mourning?

Despite its title "*Souvenir*," there is, after all, something that renders this exquisite flower of art a *nettle*—it stings with curiosity.

With the exception of a study—a head of Jeanne D'Arc—over the door, this is the only picture in the room.

Certainly Herbert Severance had brought back from the Orient a knowledge of the only way to fully enjoy a work of art.

Between the windows, pulled well out from the wall, stood a very handsome capacious desk. At this moment quantities of documents, of various shapes and sizes, were heaped upon it. And in numberless pigeon-holes were packets on packets of letters and long legal papers tied up with pink tape,

sometimes revealing a red seal appended, very pretentious, very official. Certain drawers remained closed. An unevenly distributed number of sheets of foolscap paper, freshly written over, in square regularly fashioned chirography, were held in place by a heavy silver paper-weight bearing the motto, *Amor Omnia Vincit*, and a date so distinctly imprinted as to be decipherable at several paces distant.

Facing this desk was a leather-covered revolving writing chair, and underneath it stood a generous paper-basket, half-filled with scraps of letters and envelopes.

The two low windows were set in carved wooden casements from ceiling to floor, and opened out upon a verandah, that just cleared the parterre of an enclosed garden.

On this verandah it was Herbert Severance's habit to sit and smoke for hours, as he cogitated upon the difficulties he was likely to encounter in pending law-suits, or possibly to permit his thoughts to revert to incidents and experiences entirely personal. He was a man much given to retrospection.

Well assured that the door was safely latched, the host abruptly turned to his guest.

"Dick, sit down, and smoke if you like," at the same time proffering a well-plenished cigar-case.

Dick took a cigar, and sat down close to his uncle, who had dropped heavily upon the chair facing his desk, also with a cigar between his fingers.

Both men, during the ominous moment of embarrassment which inevitably precedes the opening of a conversation destined, or pre-supposed at least, to be of importance, and not strictly considered agreeable, fooled with their cigars. The matches were scratched, when past the flaring point applied to their cigars, two or three draws and whiffs, a supervisory glance at the lighted ends, then an outing wave and tap on the corner of the desk given to the matches, and all was apparently ready for action.

Herbert Severance cleared his throat, and broke the ice.

“Dick, a while ago I was brusque and seemingly unreasonable in my speech and manner to you; but, my dear boy, believe me I was actuated by a feeling of chagrin, despair, and true solicitude for your future welfare and happiness, not merely attributable to selfishness on my part.” Now he pulled at his cigar. It cost so much to explain. “I once saw a man, suddenly and most brutally, without apparent provocation, smite to the ground a child who was innocently playing in a rolling-mill. I yelled out ‘*Shame!*’ sprang forward with clenched fists to deal the wretch a well-deserved blow, when, great God! I beheld an enormous pair of travelling cranes swing around, dragging in the clutch of their iron-toothed jaws a long bar of red-hot iron in transit from the furnace to the forge. They passed like a fiery Juggernaut, but harmlessly, just, and no more, cleared the

prostrate child, who was yet crying piteously from the stinging hurt of the unexpected blow of the man, whose act had so incensed me. He alone had seen the impending jeopardy of the little one; there was not one moment for a warning, no time to stay the course of the iron monster, and quick as thought his presence of mind forced him to fell the child to the ground! . . . It was the only chance to save him! Dick, now you understand why I was seemingly so unreasonable when you averred you should, if needs be, marry to-night. I thought I saw you standing on the extreme edge of an undercut, crumbling precipice; below you an abyss—destruction—a life of unhappiness,—whereas, you were so self-assured of your own personal safety. My boy, I dealt the blow for that reason!” His lips quivered as he spoke rapidly under the excitement of deep emotion, while a clammy perspiration bedewed his forehead, and the arteries on his temples were beating like trip-hammers.

As he had proceeded, he had gradually inclined his entire body towards Dick, until, upon finishing the words, he was so near that his quick hot breath was distinctly perceptible to the listener. Into his alert, dart-like eyes had crept a mellow, appealing, pathetic look—such a look as is sometimes noticeable when a friend holds a lonely vigil beside the bed of a beloved one, who is succumbing to death’s grim fiat, despite all ministering care and loving solicitude, despite the fact that the friend would surrender his own life as a forfeit to

prolong the life of the one doomed ; a dumb, unutterable, eloquent despair ; an inarticulate wail for an inevitable pang which lacerates a heart.

The young man's face had assumed a sturdy, immobile expression at the beginning of the narration. He had puffed with the relish of a connoisseur the excellent Havana, and had silently thrummed on the arm of his chair, looking about the room with irksomeness, much as one who was storm-stayed on the road, when a feast awaited him so soon as the journey should be terminated. However, as his uncle drew his comparison, Dick forgot to smoke, forgot to thrum, forgot to be indifferent. The colour mounted up to his hair, suffusing his face and his swelling throat crimson. He made a feint to dissemble his recurrent vexation, which but ill-concealed it from his uncle's incisive gaze.

To stay an impetuous outburst, Herbert Severance, hurriedly, but with distinctness ejaculated :

"Dick ! promise me to wait a week, a month, wait until I have opportunity to reveal to you a story, unknown to any living person but myself ; a cruel fate, a tragedy, 'as killing as the canker to the rose.' Will you promise, Dick ? Come, I will offer you no other opposition ; aye, my dear boy, I will not only comply with your after decision, but I will aid and abet your plans. Come, do this for me, Dick," urged he with insistence.

Richard Drysdale was engaged in a personal warfare between conflicting sentiments. His nature did not complacently brook interference in

matters personal. His blind, passionate infatuation for Clarisse Cornéille, his obstinacy in adhering to his own opinions until convinced they were wrong; then, to the contrary, his sincere regard for his uncle, and his manly nature's sense of absolute justice and fair play, were all up in arms shaking his resolution. For the time being he was tossed by vacillation. Ultimately, true to his exalted nature, he was swayed to accept his uncle's behest. His choler faded.

With unaffected frankness he extended his hand to his uncle, who grasped it fervently.

"Well, uncle," with an air of assumed pleasantry, "I will comply with your request. When will you unveil Isis?"

Herbert Severance stroked his forehead, and answered his nephew as one in profound thought, with a vague, far-away look in his eyes.

"I hoped to do so this morning, but this agitation has overtaxed me, and really I must have a brief respite. Say, after dinner to-night, Dick. Will that conform with your engagements?" Seeing Dick hesitate, and fearing a negative reply, he added, "It matters not about dinner, nor the lateness of the hour. You know, Dick, I am an owl with confirmed nocturnal habits."

"Very well, say ten o'clock. And now, uncle, I must hasten to placate a lady I've kept waiting at least an hour. Until to-night, *au revoir*."

Richard Drysdale quickly left the library, making a rapid departure from the house. The moment

his feet touched the pavement he swung into a striding gait, and soon disappeared.

Meanwhile Herbert Severance had arisen from his chair, opened one of the little drawers in his desk, and taken therefrom a small square packet of letters, which he placed in the inner breast pocket of his coat.

He threw himself heavily upon one of the couches, in such a posture as to avert his face, and bury it half from view in the downy cushion. Sighing deeply, he muttered in a monotonous undertone these sinister lines from his favourite poem :—

“ Meanwhile, the heinous and despiteful act
 Of Satan done in Paradise
 Was known
 In Heaven.”

CHAPTER II.

DICK'S PLIGHT.

“ Oh, think of what anxious moments pass between
The birth of plots and their last fatal periods.”

TEN o'clock tolled out resoundingly through the moonless and starless night from the neighbouring church clock, but Dick came not. The half hour stroke broke the silence, but yet no Dick.

Herbert Severance was thoroughly disquieted, and began to experience a sickening sense of disappointment as he waited in his library. All the lamps were now lighted, shedding a mellow, bland glow over every object. Two of the heavy wall draperies were looped back in such fashion as to display the books on the shelves. In quest to pass the time, he had been reading. But his apparent humour was not for his old familiar favourites, as he facetiously called them, his “pachydermatous, insensitive companions, who stand any amount of abuse or pulling about without flinching, and are totally void of the faculty of evincing petty objections or monstrous jealousies, if I turn capriciously from one to another, as might befit a whim.”

To-night the mottoes in gilded letters above

the cases, usually so trite in their significance, were only words to him. "If you approach them, they are not asleep." "If you question them, they are not secret." "If you go astray, they do not grumble." "They know not how to laugh at you if you are ignorant." He kept clenching his teeth, making the muscles of his jaws stand rigidly out, and his drawn lips nervously working. His face was clouded by a haggard expression, impossible to conceal, for he wore neither moustache nor beard. No fashion had ever deluded him into covering up his regular, handsome features. It might be through vanity, or it might be merely preference and confirmed habit.

Time had chronicled his fifty-seventh year, yet not one invidious trace of decrepitude had assailed his hale, active body. The nebulous sprinkling amid his raven locks added a glory to his visage, which increased as the silver cast predominated. Plethora had forbidden the furrows from corrugating his forehead, and the wrinkles from defacing, with their wizzening pinches, either his eyelids or the corners of his mouth. Without a stretch of imagination he could be accounted truly a fine, portly, well-conditioned, high-bred man of the world, whose chalice had been full to the brim, and from which he had quaffed long and deep of the bitter and the sweet without gluttony.

Notwithstanding a certain cordiality of address, his customary reserve was something not one of his familiars ever vouchsafed to encroach upon.

It was tacitly admitted round about among his acquaintances that he had a history, yet no one ventured to speculate thereupon, and no one knew. He was accepted as the man they each in turn found him to be, in the main beloved and respected.

Impatience and fleeting time kept apace, till the one had flown to the "wee sma' hours," and the other had plunged the waiting man into a fever of doubt and dread; yet Dick came not.

Cigar after cigar was smoked in rapid succession, filling the room with bluish haze. The laden atmosphere, his full throbbing pulses, combined to oppress him. Waiting grew intolerable. He turned down the lights, flung wide-open both windows, and stepped out upon the vine-covered verandah to inhale the cool night air. Here he sat down upon a rustic chair, to be soon lost in reverie. Presently he fancied he saw something moving stealthily under the cover of the trees between the shrubbery. He listened attentively to catch the crackling of the sand, or a footfall, and strained his vision trying to penetrate the darkness in vain. Peer intently as possible, he saw nothing except the nodding branches casting fitful shadows in the sombre light, and heard but the gentle souging of the mild breeze amid the leafage.

"Fool! fool that I am!" he ejaculated aloud in a spirit of vexation, "to allow my nerves to play such pranks with my imagination. All, too,

because that young scapegrace has not kept his appointment. Absurd !”

Just then the door-bell rang, abruptly putting an end to his soliloquy. He started to his feet, and entered the library with the intention of admitting the caller personally. As he crossed the room, he furtively glanced back at the open windows, and checked himself. Returning with an air of precaution, he closed and fastened them both securely, dropping the heavy curtains, which he carefully adjusted so as to preclude prying eyes, if there had been any, only in time to greet Dick's rap at the library door.

“Come in !”

Dick presented himself attired in evening dress. Half apologetically he said, “I beg your pardon,” almost tumbling into a chair, utterly exhausted. “It was deuced hard to get away at all ; and then, only after an avowal that I was pledged by a matter as serious as life and death.”

Something unusual had befallen him. There was an uneasy, flurried expression to his eyes, now circled by deep purple shadows. His voice and speech bore an indefinable repression. His dissimulation was probably assumed as a masque, but such did not disguise his appearance. All this was instantaneously observed by his uncle's ferret eyes. Dire suspicion flew like lightning to his brain. Dick might have broken his promise.

Too experienced and too wary a lawyer was Herbert Severance not to comprehend it would be

the height of folly to propound such a suspicion, unless he desired an instant and final rupture.

He strove to liberate Dick from his infelicitous predicament, as well as to allay an idea which perchance might be creeping into the young man's intuitions, that both his delay and his condition were being questioned.

"Never mind, Dick," were his comforting words ; "you remember I told you, in truth you know—owl that I am—one time is as good as another. You look fatigued. Will you take something to refresh you?"

These words were no sooner spoken than Richard Drysdale's head drooped forward upon his breast in a dead swoon.

Imagine the uncle's horror. So struck with consternation for a moment, he was riveted to his chair, and could not move. After the first shock had passed recovering his presence of mind he lifted Dick bodily from the chair to one of the lounges, threw open the windows, and rang vehemently and repeatedly to summon the servants.

Quick footsteps came fairly jumping up the stairs, and his valet unceremoniously rushed into the room with an affrighted look.

"Well, sir!"

"Jones, look alive! See, Master Dick has fainted. Call the other servants, and fly for the doctor. Look alive! my man; there's no time to waste!"

The well-trained valet dashed out to return

instantly, bringing a carafe of brandy and accessories, placed them upon a table beside his master, then betook himself for the doctor with break-neck speed.

What a sight to witness the tender, wild solicitude displayed by Herbert Severance. He bent over Dick's senseless form, striving to place a few drops of brandy between his pallid lips, and moistened his face with a pocket handkerchief he had dipped into the glass.

Verily, his gentleness outrivalled the touch of any woman.

The suspense, the agony he experienced were depicted on his face in a beatific expression of sympathy, love, willingness to immolate himself if he could ward off suffering from this young life, so endeared to him. The thumping throbs of his heart seemed to voice over and over again, "*Mea culpa! Mea culpa! Mea culpa!*" Recrimination was running riot through every atom of his sentient being. In some inexplicable way he felt himself to be directly associated with Dick's present state.

The prolonged unconsciousness aroused the appalling dread that *this was death*. He could not bear the thought, it threatened to madden him. In the supervening moment of trial and torture, there welled up from his soul a heartrending cry for supreme help :

"O God, spare my boy!"

Hot tears gushed from his eyes. Just one

spasmodic overflow, when the floodgates of emotion were deluged, and powerless to withstand the surging flood. . . . Suddenly, by a mighty command of latent will, he gathered mastery over himself. The storm of his present agony abated. . . . A calm prevailed, allowing him to hastily review every resource, within his immediate scope, to aid the sufferer.

He proceeded to unbutton Dick's collar, unfastening successively every portion of his attire that seemed to restrict free respiration. He chafed, or rather slapped Dick's bluish hands, drew the fainted form down flat on the lounge, and held his nostrils, as he placed his own mouth over Dick's pallid lips, endeavouring clumsily to force his own breath into Dick's quiescent lungs; at the same time recalling, and putting into requisition, divers instructions of his doctor—a good soul who was ever proffering to sucklings and blunderers, advice “in case of an accident or family emergency.” So he pressed and relaxed at regular intervals, his outspread hands over the patient's abdomen.

At length, Dick gave a moan, breathed with difficulty, and slowly opened his eyes, turning them about in a dazed, wondering manner; finally they inquiringly sought his uncle's.

“It's all right, my dear boy,” at once said the uncle, in an assuring tone, “just take a nip of brandy.” He suited the invitation by placing a glass partially filled to Dick's lips. He swallowed

it without effort, and forthwith revived, turning smilingly towards his uncle.

"Uncle," feebly spoke Dick, "these attacks make sudden and close calls upon a fellow. I don't half like it. . . . Have I been unconscious long?"

"No, only a few minutes. But, you see, Dick, I am such a bungling old chap, I didn't know what to do at first, and made a general fool of myself by losing my head. I've sent for the doctor, but, as usual with the medical man, he will blandly get in at the finish."

Neither of the men had noticed the presence of two maid-servants, who stood timorously on the threshold, goggled-eyed and agape, not venturing to tender any assistance.

Hurrying steps were heard on the pavement approaching the front door,—the occasion for both of the maids to huddle close together, scared almost out of their feeble senses, to admit the doctor and valet.

With a sort of frantic clutch at the door-knob, and a nervous twitch, they jerked open the door, which flew back with a bang against the wall, making them shrink back in a startled way. They actually expected an unseen ghoul to rise up and grab them. Ignorance and superstition are the progenitors of such nameless terrors, usually rendering this class of persons helpless in an emergency.

Hearing the commotion, with effort Dick pulled himself together, and awaited the doctor's appearance.

Dr Covert accosted him on entering the room, not in the set professional tone of a general practitioner, that has the effect of seeming to imply that all suffering is a downright sham, and that the particular patient being diagnosed is a victim of hypochondria, or, going to the other extreme of the high-fee specialist, with an assumption of great alarm, implying that there *never was such another case*—*never*, certainly with such obscure and perplexing complications, requiring the greatest skill to possibly pull the patient through, thereby making recovery just short of a miracle. Not thus, but rather as a family friend who keenly sympathises with the patient, Dr Covert took Dick's hand in a caressing fond way, and, the while, cleverly slipped his fingers over his pulse, noted the beats quite casually, saying in a jocular although gentle tone :

"Mr Drysdale, do you consider this proper behaviour, to disturb an old friend between night and morning for a drop of physic? Confess, my reckless friend, to a category of indiscretions, such as late hours, champagne suppers, other dissipations far too innumerable to name, &c., &c., &c. ! and, to top off, acknowledge that you are a trifle hysterical? Cause—some lovely creature, who has kindled a fervent passion in your heart, and fully reciprocates ; but, opposition fierce ; papa an old griffin, or a dragon of a guardian ; and, well, you have keeled over on the rough road of true love ! eh ? and need a tonic."

This little trick of the doctor's, although crowding close upon the truth, had effectually banished any restraint on the part of the patient, so that in veering round to the serious, all was natural and unstrained.

So much for the non-alarmist methods of a capital doctor, who believes in this species of mind-cure, if in none other.

"But, joking aside, tell me, Mr Drysdale, have you ever had a similar attack before?"

Dick nodded affirmatively, but spake not. The doctor slipped his hand up beneath the patient's waistcoat, under his left shoulder, unceremoniously placing his ear close to Dick's chest over the heart. This done, without a change in the expression of his pleasant sphynx-like countenance, he quietly opened his medicine-case, which, by-the-by, he always exercised the precaution to carry with him "in case of an emergency or accident," whether on a round of professional calls, or merely paying friendly visits.

"Jones, bring me a tumbler half-full of water and a teaspoon." The servant despatched, the doctor said earnestly, "Mr Drysdale, I may prudently tell you that there is a manifestation of weakness in the valves of your heart. According to Fothergill, we will administer digitalis and hyoscyamus. Ahem! by-the-by, did you have rheumatism during your old campaigning days?"

"Bless your heart, doctor!" laughingly interrupted Herbert Severance, "Dick was a baby

during the war ! I declare your hobby gallops you along at a ridiculous rate, with your theory of 'rheumatic diathesis,' 'atheromatous conditions of the arteries,' and 'their sequels;' you see I've it down to a fine point, and all based on 'army exposure!' Oh, doctor ! so much for having an ex-army surgeon for your medical man. Doctor, you're a delicious theoretical crank ! Ha ! ha ! ha !"

After this sally the doctor also laughed good naturedly, and lamely responded, as a weak attempt to repudiate what he felt to be too true :

"It takes a long time, as the common saying goes, 'to teach an old dog new tricks.'"

The medicine was soon mixed, and a stiff dose administered to Dick. He had already revived so thoroughly, he was essaying to rise from his recumbent position. His countenance had lost its pallor. He began to assure the doctor how sorry he was to have disturbed him. Then, with peculiar direction of purpose, lowering his voice to a confidential tone,

"Had I better see you to-morrow, doctor ? I cannot take time just now to indulge in a lie-a-bed illness. . . . Imperative business presses me, doctor. . . . Absolutely, *I must not be ill.*"

The doctor had slowly shaken his head in a dubious manner.

"You stop here to-night," he queried, "or go to your own quarters, eh ?"

"Here," answered Dick, "that is, provided uncle will tolerate such a nuisance, and self-invited guest. What do you say, uncle ?"

"Dick, it is too outrageous to put it that way. You vex me. You know I am never so happy as when my roof shelters you," reproachfully retorted Herbert Severance.

"That's settled," added the doctor. "And now I must enjoin quiet upon you, my young miscreant; for the remedies given in my *heavy artillery* doses have sometimes a tendency to excite certain brain centres before they begin to work perceptible good. However, take a dose every half-hour while awake, Mr Drysdale. Good night. I'll call before you are up in the morning."

The servant started to usher the doctor out, but Mr Severance interfered.

"Jones, stop with Mr Drysdale; I'll see the doctor to the door."

Once they were without the library, and the door securely shut, he looked anxiously at the doctor.

"Is Dick dangerously affected?" he inquired in a low searching tone.

"Yes, and no," paradoxically answered the doctor, continuing, "Sudden excitement, joy, anger, or despair might kill him like a shot. Yet with his youth, and tenacity for life, he may outlive us veterans. At all events, let's hope so. I suspect it's mental worry, more than physical ailments, that affects men of his temperament. Passivity, equanimity, and repose are the necessary qualities for Mr Drysdale to cultivate. For this cogent reason, his case is extremely difficult. If all I hear be true, all those elements have long

since been cast out of his life in his ceaseless drive on the high-pressure principle. Hang it all ! there is nothing for a physician to do in such a case—except in an emergency like to-night—but chide and warn, turn parson and preach ; nothing—nothing else—I assure you. Medical science is not worth the powder to blow it up, unless you win the co-operation of the patient. However, I don't propose to deliver a lecture. Until to-morrow, my friend, free your mind from anxiety. I do not apprehend a recurrence at once. Good-night."

At this parting admonition, seasoned with a suspiciously uncertain hope, the doctor departed, and Herbert Severance repaired to the library, determined to caution Dick.

"Jones, prepare Master Richard's room," ordered he ; and the well-trained servant made a hasty exit, knowing it was a gentle hint that his master wished to be left alone with Master Dick.

"Dick, the doctor says emphatically that you must be very careful of yourself ; avoid undue excitement of all sorts, not over-work, take rest—"

The young man broke out with an excitability, augmented probably by the draughts of brandy and stiff doses of the drugs.

"There ! there ! uncle ! you know my motto—*Dum vivimus vivamus* ; and when I am compelled to abdicate my fulness of life, to be coddled and nursed, I'll give the whole thing up and take a whirl into *terra incognita* !"

"But, Dick, do be rational, and weigh the doc-

tor's advice. You know he is not an alarmist, and only cautions you to preclude lamentable results," quickly interjected Herbert Severance.

"No, no, uncle, restraint goads me—lashes up all my combativeness. Hobble a race-horse; pinion Mercury's winged-feet, bid the tides hold back at ebb, and trickle their flow through some trumpery, grotesque gargoyle, expect the sun to filter its rays through a pin-hole, and you might secure the same result that would befall the restriction of my life by a set schedule of '*musts*' and '*mustn'ts*,' '*lets*' and '*hindrances*.' Bah! such prudence is decrepit, senile, old-womanish. I say, once and for all, strangle her! for I'll take none of her nauseous pap and milk-sop. No! no! *I must*—*I shall live* to the utmost, until I face death."

This was so characteristic of Dick's professed theory and indefatigable method of life, his uncle could not suppress a smile, as the splenic volley of impulsive words flew hot from his lips.

CHAPTER III.

THE UNCLE'S STORY.

“Why need a man forestall his date of grief,
And run to meet what he would most avoid?”

“UNCLE,” Dick resumed, in a serious vein, after the lapse of a moment, “let us indulge in no more nonsense of this order. You will have the goodness to recall the fact that I came here with a special purpose; and, now that the unpleasant episode I untowardly visited upon you has passed—thanks to your admirable care—let me urge you to comply with the tenets of our compact like men and lawyers.”

“Dick,” his uncle nervously ventured, “I dare not risk exciting you to-night. Let our conversation be adjourned till morning.”

Angered by these words, the young man rose to his feet, and commenced to pace the room.

“Uncle,” said he, in a piqued tone, “I counted on your compliance, otherwise nothing could have induced me to return. You don’t know what I have been through. I assure you, not one moment of rest can I take before you allay a thousand odious mis-trusts, which our morning’s conversation and later occurrences have marshalled forth, equipped mali-

ciously, to torture me out of my reason. . . .” He tossed his head upwards, and pressed his temples with his clenched fists, pacing with spurts of rapidity. “Great God! I believe, uncle, that hell is made up of doubts and demoned with insinuations, akin to these, I have heard voiced this night by an invidious, loathsome, mortal coward, who dared not name his authority for the blasting things he shamelessly bruited about. Coward! coward! he directed at random his poisoned missiles to rankle in the hearts of the innocent! Oh, heavens! if only I could know—know beyond suspicion—whether I am the victim of an hallucination—whether the odious calumnies be founded—whether I am, after all, the dupe of a scheme, laid so deep and with such cunning, it defies detection; or whether, as I fain believe, they spring from the wicked heart of a vile depredator of every sacred trait of pure, noble womanhood! O, God! if I could only know! If I could only know!” As if these wild, significant words clove his heart, they were gasped out frantically.

Meanwhile, he had paced to and fro with such rapidity, he was exhausted, and compelled to resume a recumbent position.

Herbert Severance was amazed, but remained a speechless witness to the wild, passionate outburst.

Dick's eyes roved restlessly over the room as he lay panting. Finally they caught sight of the picture “*Souvenir*.” A swift consciousness recalled his thoughts to the present time and place.

He vaulted from his emotional frenzy into a fresh mood.

"Who posed for the lady in that picture, uncle?" The query was so incongruous and fugacious, that it bordered on the ridiculous. "Did you not many years ago tell me that you knew the model?"

A shadow darkened Herbert Severance's face.

"Yes, Dick. But let bygones be bygones. It is a hobby of mine to think now-a-days that I am wise, and that

' My strict hand
Was made to seize on vice, and with a grip
Squeeze out the humour of such spongy souls
As lick up every idle vanity !'

That, Dick, was one of my youthful vanities."

"That's all very fine, uncle, but it in no way allays my curiosity. Do you know, uncle, that I have a strong inkling that I have the pleasure, or misfortune, I know not which yet, to number the daughter —"

"Dick! what in the name of God do you mean?" fiercely cried out Herbert Severance. "Explain—tell me what hideous joke you seek to perpetrate upon me? Remember, young man, there are circumstances in every mortal's life, respecting which all intimation on the part of another is a profanation meriting the severest chastisement. *What do you mean?*"

Both men had sprung to their feet, and were now standing confronting each other face to face,

impelled by an instinct every human being feels when treading upon debatable premises, to gain a firm footing, uncramped by chairs or corners.

"As I was about to remark," Dick resumed his speech in lieu of a direct rebuttal, with a touch of startled agitation in his accents, "I believe I know *the daughter* of the *lady* who sat for that portraiture." He pointed to the picture. "And singularly enough, as it seems to concern you so trenchantly, *it is she* whom I desire to wed!"

"*Dick,*" his uncle fairly gasped, "Dick, *do you veritably mean the daughter of that lady?*" pointing to the picture, "or am I stark mad?"

He had fixed his eyes upon Dick's face, and seeing him nod assent, fairly reeled to the open window, clutched firmly both sides of the casement to prevent himself from falling, as he swayed to and fro, back and forth, as a ship eddying in a whirlpool, and gasping for breath like one suffocating.

Dick remained standing motionless. Dumfounded by his uncle's circumstantial confession, although entirely inferential on his own part, he too felt his brain whirling in a maelstrom which threatened to engulf his reason. Through the dizzy vagaries, prompted by his present cerebral excitation, came tripping the thought, *this was*—not knowing what—

"The heinous and spiteful act
Of Satan done in Paradise,"

that his uncle was forever quoting, and was then the knowledge of it to blight his heaven?

These fragmentary thoughts now swirled madly through his brain, taxing his present lack of strength, with peril to his fortitude. To him the wind was not tempered. Dread was breeding a calamity. He felt the necessity of asserting his manhood, or of being swamped. All the hideous rumours of the club came back, rendering his misery more abject. Some step *must* be promptly taken, for this suspense was destroying him. By a supreme effort he dragged himself to the window, convulsively grasped his uncle's arm—

"Come, uncle," he aspirated, rather than spoke, in a whisper. "Come, sit down. Clear up this *mystery*. Suspense, I avow, is nigh wrecking my reason." Gaining self-control more firmly: "Come, perchance you will also experience relief, and perhaps we may sustain each other. Only let me know the worst at once."

Dick's earnestness told forcibly upon his uncle. He turned, and allowed himself to be led by the young man like a child to an arm-chair, where he sank down as one who finds all power to maintain his weight upon his legs suddenly collapse.

Compensatory for physical failure in his stamp of nature comes a mental force, which imparted to him an unmistakable spirit of resolution to achieve a certain purpose at any cost of abnegation.

Dick, greatly overcome, stretched himself at full length upon one of the lounges, facing his uncle.

A sullen calm reigned. The very walls seemed portentous. But a moment only intervened, whereupon Herbert Severance, with his usual legal directness, began—

“Dick, just after graduating from Harvard, my father sent me on a holiday trip round the world before I should settle down to my profession. His parting injunctions to me were, ‘Herbert, don’t make a fool of yourself by falling in love with the first attractive girl you chance to be thrown with. See plenty of the fair sex, my boy, and you will find that the adorable *one* is a very *rara avis*, whom you must seek for persistently before you find, and, when once found, must be vigilantly treasured to keep. And, above all, never make an alliance that may entangle you as helplessly as the *Lady of Shalot*,—not, at least, until you are absolutely sure that you are not deluded—that you are not falsely allured. In fact, Herbert, guard against a *faux pas* that may blight your whole life, and teach you the bitterness of repining. See the world, my boy. Draw on me for any reasonable amount over your own income (which I inherited from my mother); return a full-fledged, manly man, above the meanness of having wronged man or woman, with a clear conscience, and receive your father’s blessing.’

“In true American fashion, I took the quickest steamship sailing for Queenstown, *en route* for Paris *via* London; of course only tarrying in London long enough to hustle through and about

the places of historical and local interest, getting a general idea of land-points, obtaining a smattering of this, that, and the other before I bolted off to Paris.

“Once in Paris, I Frenchified my stilted over-grammatical French, so that I could be understood and understand. I soon plunged into an unceasing round of sight-seeing and dissipation without a care or responsibility to curb my foolish career.

“My object was, as I excused myself to myself, to become familiar with Parisian life;—life on the Boulevards; life in *le quartier Latin*; Bourgeois life—life—life—every sort, and every phase was my quest, as a student, as a man. I proposed to know the whole gamut. My companions, both masculine and feminine, were Bohemians; hence I was untrammelled by the Procrustean strictures of over-scrupulous propriety, or of a binding code of social ethics. Perfect freedom was mine, indisputably mine.

“Soon I found myself so sated, that I frequently was in a serious quandary to divine what novelty to seek for my delectation. Everything was growing stale and vapid. The companions who had once been a source of, what I thought, genuine pleasure to me, were gradually becoming insufferable. The sparkle of their wit, or what went for such, which so recently had provoked my risibility, was irksome, ribald, venal. I marvelled how I ever had degenerated so low as to permit any intimacy to grow up between myself and such commonplace folk.

“Even the little *grisettes* who were the companions of the majority of the young fellows, in my present mood had lost all their *chic*, all their attractiveness. Their piquant coquetries, formerly so much admired by me, were now actually repulsive.

“Were they *passé*, or was I *blasé*? I queried, with something akin to a real desire for information. Whether the newly discovered deficiencies, the flaws, the lack-lustre, were theirs, or mine? Whether I was not wanting in taste and appreciation? Never arriving at a satisfactory solution, and as the cloying grew more disgusting, I firmly resolved to kick the Parisian dust from off my heels, and visit the Orient, for this had been an objective point in my planned peregrinations.

“There, to make serious studies of the topography, history, condition of those countries, and learn something of the incentives and lives of the poetic people, who, although wrapt in and permeated by dreamy sensuousness, never become the gross, brutal voluptuaries of Paris, or of other climes I had known.

“Imbued with a strong tendency for all things appertaining to Orientalism, and, as an amateur, having already gleaned, from books, professors, and travellers, a not mean or totally insignificant knowledge of the Orient, I naturally bent my steps in that direction.

“One evening while sitting in a *café-chantant*, I invited all my *convives* to make merry, eat and

drink at my expense, according to their various tastes. Then I announced my intention to depart in the morning for an extended tour. It fell like a bomb in the little circle. Consternation and protestations tinged the ensuing conversation. My true-heartedness, my fidelity were sorely charged as being traitorous, by one and all. Yet, for all, I was unshaken in my plans, and after a boisterous night, steeped in reckless eating, drinking, and jollity, the rosy morn saw me ready to launch forth upon my well-considered project.

“I left Paris and its mocking whited sepulchres; the city in which I had for the first time pressed to my lips the dead-sea fruit of unmanliness; the city where I learned to trip the name of woman lightly, as though her spotlessness was of no more consequence than the beauty of the *boutonnière* that chanced to grace my lapel, but for a single evening.

“*En route* for Milan, where I directed my journey with despatch in the hope to join a college chum, it fell into my path to do a trifling, gallant service for a young girl, whom at the time I thought French. She was travelling, chaperoned by a hired Cerebus, but still chaperoned. They had booked places in the same railway carriage in which I was already comfortably esconced, booked through for Milan. They attempted to enter over-burdened with a countless array of hand-baggage, which I civilly aided them to adjust, and surrendered my corner to the young girl, as it was on the shady

side of the carriage, and the sun was glaring and hot.

“Now, to my memory, as then to my vision, she was a marvellous beauty. Not as to strict regularity of features or typical style, but her face, her figure, in truth her *tout ensemble*, possessed a fascination for me that was increased tenfold by the dulcet, limpid accents of her clear sweet voice. I resorted to every subterfuge short of actual rudeness to provoke her to speak. There was a *naïveté* in what she said, and in her manner of speaking, unsullied by affectation, which put my heart in pawn at once.

“Soon I detected, from certain allusions made to her chaperone, that she was an American by parentage, if not by birth, but expatriated by her foreign education, and that she was alone in the world. I concluded that she was a student bent on some career, for she constantly alluded to ‘*my work*.’

“In a moment of absent-mindedness, gazing at the flying landscape as the train steamed along, she hummed in an almost indistinguishable voice the dashing air of a charming *chansonnette*, which was at that moment *en vogue* with all the *boulevardiers* at Paris. Like a flash, methought could she be professional? And then, I know not why, it occurred to me, might it not be possible that this personage was the promising Clarisse Arditti?”—at this name Dick shuddered, but did not break the thread of his uncle’s narrative—“for whom the leading critics

predicted such an enviable future? I was burning with curiosity.

“ Emboldened by the freedom of an acquaintanceship that gradually grows when the first barrier is cleared by trifling civilities as a journey proceeds, I ventured to speak to her.

“ ‘ Mademoiselle, are you going to Milan ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Yes, monsieur, I hope to,’ was her simple response.”

Herbert Severance felt that time was flying, and checked himself a moment.

“ Let me summarise all details, Dick. *She was* the young *prima donna*, *en route* to Milan to fulfil an engagement at La Scala—a first season.

“ She was a grand success. Acclamation poured upon her from the most conservative and punctilious critics. She was forthwith accounted a phenomenon, a star of the first magnitude.

“ In the progress of time our acquaintance ripened into an intimate friendship. This lovely girl, without guile or other motive than to sing as the birds, because she could not help it, and because it was her destined vocation, held me vassal to her slightest caprice. Night after night, I was in the orchestra stalls, showering flowers upon her, and in a state of ecstatic rapture, revelling in the mystical charm of the peculiar *timbre* of her voice, all the while secretly indulging in a wild burning dream that some day I might capture this queen of song.

“ Fool ! fool ! that I was, in my blind enthralment, I did not see that this lovely lily could not

stand the blasting hot-breath of such success—could not remain uncontaminated by the infectious atmosphere of the promiscuous adulation of sycophants. Nor, could I perceive that her coyness was becoming tinctured with and coloured by a growing necessity for admiration, nor, that her artistic soul was becoming so wedded to her art, that she yearned to live the intensely passionate stories she was constantly acting and phrasing.

“ Her genius, spurred by her attainments, was mounting at a breathless pace to such lofty heights that the girl's pure, immaculate heart was being pulsed to, subjugated by the demands of fealty—unqualified fealty—to her vocation, to her art, to her second nature. There were times when she was so carried out of herself by her *rôle*, it was almost a nightly event for the audience to rise *en masse*, incited by a furor of excitement like a surging sea billowed in a tempest, and fairly howl, 'mid deafening applause, before she had more than sung the last note of certain passages—‘*bravo ! bravissimo ! bis ! bis ! bis !!*’ Encore after encore, compelled this darling of the public to repeat again, and again, favourite arias in which she had brilliantly excelled.

“ The irresistible magnetism she exercised over her audience owed its sovereignty to the complete *abandon* and *elan* with which she threw herself into the part.

“ Her true identity was coalescing in an invidious way with her artistic presentations.

"In *La Traviata* she was the embodiment of *Violetta*. The curse of her pseudo-frivolity, her enacted prodigality and unchastity, racked her with pitiable poignancy, and reaction always followed at the expense of her nervous organisation.

"Verily, the retribution of her artistic sinning was the origin of many of her apparently normal eccentricities. The constant change of operas, the limitless versatility of her repertoire, were warping the singleness of her character. . . . To-night *Elvira*, to-morrow *Leonora*, then *Gilda*, anon *Marguerite* and *Violetta*, each equally perfect in its rendition.

"The subtle process was actually *subsidizing* her unformed, pliant nature *to art*. She was merging into an inconsequent, artistic renegade. . . Yet, I dreamed of nought but her.

"My fortune was ample, my position well assured, therefore, I could place this pampered idol of a too fickle public upon a lofty pedestal, where no new favourites could supplant her. I urged my suit, and won.

"It was the termination of the season, but she had already signed iron-bound contracts for the ensuing Paris and London seasons, inviolable except by the payment of ruinous forfeitures. Moreover, their non-fulfilment must blight her untarnished popularity. And if she was so soon to surrender the *éclat* of her dear public for one loving, devoted heart, it was ungenerous to thus rob her lyric and histrionic fame of a single laurel. I agreed that she

might fulfil these engagements, stipulating that we should be married and seek for her a respite during the interim of her seasons in the Alps.

“At this her impresario was furious, avowing half her lustre as a Star would be lost if she married. This objection was surmounted, and the tyrannical impresario propitiated by a stratagem. We resolved between ourselves, after due deliberation, to marry clandestinely. And we did.

“This left the *diva* free to receive the court of her train of worshippers. There was a spice of romance and adventure in the incumbent secrecy enjoined upon us. The permissible and carefully arranged rendezvous at stated times, possessed a charm that in no way detracted from our heyday of joyance.

“The mischievous coquetry she subjected me to in the presence of others added a piquancy to her many fascinations. We were enacting an idyllic drama of the romanesque school. So we thought in those whilom days, before we were touched by sorrow.

“One afternoon we sauntered into the studio of a celebrated French painter whom we knew slightly. We found him in a perfect frenzy of discouragement, because he could not procure a suitable model for a picture he had composed and hoped to finish for a rapidly approaching exhibition—an exhibition of historical romantic pictures of the *Louis Seize* period, by French painters *hors du concours*.

“It was to be given under the patronage of the

Empress Eugénie, and the competition was for nothing less than a title. It was verily to be an *Atalanta* race of the nineteenth century to win the Empress's favour.

"The painter had made an *ébauch*, and in fact had painted the figures in on his canvas, but the faces remained blanks. Seeing his despair, in a spirit of sheer merriment and banter, Clarisse"—again this name seemed to pierce Dick—"said, 'I can make up a lovely semblance for a *grande dame* of the *Louis Seize* period, and as romance is said to have no day, or people, or history, that does not repeat itself, I'll pose for the lady. And with great artifice, perhaps, we could manage to make up Monsieur Severance to masquerade with humility at my feet as yon antique *Monsieur le courtier*. It will be such rare sport, for as yet I have no souvenirs ; my life, my pleasures, my joys are all of to-day.'" Thereafter, followed some scintillating repartee, in which we all participated.

"De La Rue, the painter, eagerly seized the offer, and then and there arranged a first sitting. He was not slow to see his way more than out of his dilemma ; for in this purely inadvertent chance, he sagaciously perceived the grand good fortune which allowed him to present the *bona fide* portraiture of the renowned *diva*, who was now in the very zenith of her conquests, and a destined favourite at the French Court. Hereby, he could add a crowning *éclat* to his own glory. Presto ! his dejected mood was transformed to one of transport. Less

opportunity, far less, had more than once made the fame of an unknown painter, whereas, he merely strove ambitiously to reach a higher pinnacle, having already an enviable and established celebrity.

"Soon he felt sure the loud-mouthed harbingers of news, who cluster about the studios and green-rooms, would herald the name of his illustrious model.

"Fate seemed beneficent to the painter. Yes, to the painter beneficent, but alas, to me and mine, she was busy with her shuttle weaving a snare—an accursed snare—*tout le monde est sage après coup*."

And Herbert Severance with a deep sigh settled back in his chair, appearing like a man who was losing himself in a dream.

Dick urged impatiently.

"Well, uncle, what follows?"

This effectually roused him.

"Dick, *that picture* hurled a lovely innocent woman to *perdition*! That *picture* robbed me of the wife I idolized!"

Another pause, broken only by smothered sobs. Herbert Severance had buried his face in his folded arms, as he bowed over his desk. His frame shook like a sturdy oak in a tempest.

Dick contemplated his uncle in wonderment, stunned by the confession. He felt uncertain whether to speak or go to him, and by a pressure of the hand, or by some affectionate word, evince sympathy. Whilst Dick yet groped in his own mind as to his best course, Herbert Severance looked up.

"Dick, I cannot continue to-night."

Dick stepped spontaneously to his uncle's side, leant over his chair, placing one arm about his uncle's shoulders, and grasped the opposite hand in his own to emphasise by its hearty clasp his meaning.

"Uncle, do not grieve this way," he said, in one of those heart-sent minor tones that make some men's voices, when touched through emotion, thrill with compassion. "Perhaps it may condone for the pain caused by the recital of your bereavement, to know that *it shall not be lost upon me.*"

These words illuminated Herbert Severance's countenance with satisfaction.

"I thank God for that, Dick!"

CHAPTER IV.

REFLECTIONS.

“How rare are acts of will! We are all living according to custom : we do as other people do, and shrink from an act of our own.”

ONCE ensconced in his room, Richard Drysdale plunged deep in meditation. He suffered as though on an invisible rack, which shook perceptibly his entire being. In no sense was he one of the gregarious throng of a clique, or a truckler to society, hedged in by dwarfish limitations ; he was, on the contrary, a man forever railing against the vicarious methods of obtaining wisdom through the experience of others, and yet an out-and-out heretic to the reactionary malice of the cross-grained doctrine, that the crimes of the parents were virtually “visited upon the children of the third and fourth generation.”

Individual responsibility was the keynote to all his judgments of human nature, to all his claims for consideration of others for his personal deeds and shortcomings.

He meant to call no man prince, because his sire had been king ; no man dastard, or thief, because his parents had rifled the treasure of another, or

had been a miscreant ; he recognised no patents, no trade-marks, no monopolies in families for virtues, or crimes, or mediocrities.

To him, the theory of hereditary traits required something akin to supernatural astuteness to differentiate, in consequence of the blending of the maternal and paternal individualisms, antagonisms, harmonies, and temperaments. Who dare say with any degree of certainty, what mysterious forces with irresistible gravity had been at work to evolve a new species in the lineal descendants of the most exalted, or the most ignoble progenitors ? Nature's crafty alchemy, according to his reasoning, was far too subtle to formulate by set rules, far too recondite, obscure, and indivisible to probe by cold methodical science.

Education, surroundings, conditions, anomalous accidents, or even the sneaking malice of disease, were far more puissant in the development of character than the blue blood of a dynasty of nobility, —than the damning wickedness vitiating and corroding the blood of an outcast or down-trodden class.

Then, again, he could but consider that the most beautiful flowers, their calyxes charged with entrancing perfume, or the stinking phallus, the most luscious fruits, or the upas tree, owe their perfection or noisomeness, edibility or poison to what ? Loath as he was to admit it, the fact obstinately existed, that they were indebted to the same soil, the same fertilisation, the same sun, the same

climate, but above all to heredity. The acorn always produces an oak, the grain of mustard the mustard plant, and so on ; and yet, after all, the infallibility of any doctrine was preposterous in his conclusions, because repellant to his sentiment.

If like mother, like daughter, his hopes would be dashed.

But why disturb himself with abstruse philosophy ? Why cast about in deep water impossible to fathom ? The subject which concerned him now so intimately, and so perturbed him, was one far afield.

Discretion, judgment, decision, and a cool head were all he required. He had nothing fiercer, nor more occult than doubt to contend against, but *that doubt* was armoured in suspicion, and *that suspicion* had been linked, link by link, out of circumstantial evidences, and he had failed to tear it to pieces in order to know the truth. It gripped him on all sides ; he could not discard it despite his will !

How his uncle's story tormented him. He yearned to know the end.

After some time of scrutinizing consideration, when his thoughts turned inward upon themselves, he resolved to boldly and frankly seek the whole ungarnished truth, at the earliest moment possible, and act for himself, free and unprejudiced. His distraught brain seemed to find a needed panacea in this resolve. He yielded to the fatigue which had gained upon him. He slept, a restless troubled

sleep, filled with dire visions, moans, and starts. Now and again his heavy eyelids quiveringly half opened, only to droop and close instantly. He was not resting but unconsciously conscious, in a state which produced a mental *fata morgana* that vivified his tribulations, and threw an infinite glamour over past joys, inspiring his heart with rapturous hope.

CHAPTER V.

PLEASANT INTERLUDES.

“ Black spirits and white,
Red spirits and grey ;
Mingle, mingle, mingle,
You that mingle may.”

AS the ringleader of a party of four, Richard Drysdale the previous year had made an extensive pleasure trip in Europe. His companions—Edward Kingston, Henry Bacon, and Jasper Rodgers—were all painters who aimed to utilise the sights and scenes of their trip, as well as excuse themselves from the appellation of *dawdlers*. Hence they industriously made scores of sketches and studies, gleaned, as it were, materials to be worked up at leisure in their studios upon their return home.

Whereas, Dick was merely seeking recreation from overwork, his chief amusement, pursued by him with native intensity, was to discover new picturesque spots and characteristic models to lend *genre*, force and local colour for his friends' pictures. His zest and talent in this direction ever resulted in profitable success to them.

When they fain carped at him good humouredly

about his being an idler, he always retaliated in kind.

“Hoity-toity! fine pictures you muddlers would paint, with your crazy harum-scarum imaginations, if I didn’t pay attention to the *mise en scène* for you one and all! Besides, I’m not so sure but in the cells of my brain there may not be a stupendous work crystallizing. Was it not Emerson who wrote, ‘We do not know to-day whether we are busy or idle. In times when we have thought ourselves indolent, we have afterwards discovered that much was begun in us.’?”

Bacon interrupted him.

“Don’t philosophise, Dick. We’re taking a holiday, you mustn’t forget.”

“Rather dose us with *rubrical eccentricities*, then we’ll paint the town red according to a canon,” added the metaphoric Kingston.

During their tarriance in Normandy he had arranged such charming *séances* for them, with such duckish models, that jovial Jasper Rodgers was provoked into twitting Dick to his comrades.

“Egad! I think Dick has a match-making contract on with the peasantry!”

However, no sooner did Dick perceive that his chums were becoming too deeply engrossed in their models, than he always interposed a fresh plan, based on a plausible array of reasons—often invented to suit the exigencies of the occasion—for moving on to view new fields. He would turn the tables, and then chaff them in a merciless way.

“Good gracious! fellows, why are you not consistent, and hold to your holiday compacts? One might naturally infer from observation that you were all arduous students of anthropology. For a fact, you waste most of your time bringing local colour to the cheeks of these bonny models, with your empty compliments and preposterous avowals, making their foolish, credulous hearts leap with impossible joy! Come, now, we want no new versions of *Guenn*. It’s a downright shame. Let’s pull out, and ho, for England, Ireland, or Scotland, for a variety!”

They were ever ready to chime in with his well-ordered plans, especially if—as was too often the case—with silly inconsequence, in a spirit of “it makes them happy, and don’t hurt us,” they had committed themselves awkwardly by their nonsense. Poor little serio-comic models naturally were they elated, by dazzling false hopes, out of their normal station. A few hasty sittings were usually required at such climaxes, affected in a matter-of-fact way, giving strict attention to getting their sketches in form before their kits were in readiness. The lachrymose models, each one protesting to her particular artist, to her beau ideal, who had indued the evanescent days with such inexpressible rapture, that he was leaving her “*avec un clou dans mon cœur*.” All the same, they were duly abandoned by their holiday traducers, left without material consolation except the generous silver wage, a few trinkets, and the vague promise, “some-time we may return,” which they never did.

In the course of their peregrinations they found themselves back in London. It was during the gruesome period of spring fogs. They were on the eve of fixing upon an itinerary for an excursion to the Isle of Wight, to get, as suggested by Dick, "the loveliest sea-coast views of rock-bound Albion," when an untoward event upset their immature plan.

Dick was summoned by cable to sail within a fortnight for America on important business.

However, as they were most hospitably entertained by new and old friends at the various clubs, often fêted beyond their deserts, they counted it no great sacrifice to have the residue of time in town.

One day a friend of Dick's—a business friend—a distinguished banker, a financial potentate of potentates—suggestively remarked to the quartette :

"It is so atrociously dull during this nasty weather in London, I fancy that you gentlemen find it decidedly slow and tiresome. As Americans, you are keen after novelties, I presume?"

They each spoke up with native gusto, while the more lymphatic Semitic Englishman smiled quizzically.

"That depends largely on the novelty," said Jasper Rodgers.

"The man with the *tête de veau* is abominable," offered Kingston.

"Then again, sir, sometimes *le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*," added Bacon.

"A lion's company is agreeable if he is a biped," said Dick as a capper-off.

"Ah! gentlemen, the novelty I have in mind is unique. Our bank, mark you, *our bank* as a financial institution *has a ward!* The mother superior of a certain convent in France but recently turned *this ward* over to our bank. She—the ward—has just finished her education. She is a beautiful, accomplished, winsome girl, with a most romantic history, inheriting at her birth a regal fortune, which was trustee'd to our bank until she came of age. Having just attained her majority, her fortune has come into her possession."

There was a general burst of exclamations, such as "A full flush," "Double six," "Takes the cake."

"Now, young gentlemen, allow me to tell you that she is my guest, and only tarries in England until I find a suitable escort with whom I am willing to entrust her to voyage to America to her sole relative and guardian. As *dame de compagnie* she fortunately has attached to her Miss Edith Longstreth, a lady aquarellist, who has painted some remarkable Normandy *genre*. The ward, herself, is wonderfully gifted. She sings like a nightingale. By-the-by, Miss Longstreth is well known in art and literary circles in Europe, and, if I mistake not, also in America."

"Oh, certainly, Edith Longstreth," said Bacon; "I've seen her clever pictures more than once."

"Well, as you are all Americans, and, am I correct, Mr Drysdale, three artists?"—Dick nodded

—"and one gentleman at large, perhaps you might experience some delectation in each other's society. Will you dine with us *en famille*,—fortunately my wife and two daughters are in town for a few weeks, equipping themselves for the sea-shore,—and have some music, or join a theatre party, say for next Wednesday?"

Accept! They were not dolts. Just fancy declining—four young ladies, music, theatre-party, the baron, the baroness!

"Yes, with exceeding pleasure," was the answer to a man.

"Baron de Sillvermann," Richard Drysdale said discreetly, "I hope you will pardon the avidity with which we accept. The pleasure of meeting ladies of refinement at home is such a treat, after knocking about on the Continent, we forget to disguise, by some reluctance or conventional hesitancy, our true feelings of delight."

This outspoken ingenuousness had a telling effect upon the genial-hearted baron-banker, who liked the true ring of the unalloyed gold as much in men as in sovereigns.

It was settled. The engagement was forthwith calendared in red.

After leaving the club the four companions indulged in a general colloquy. The fact that the baron had not mentioned the name of the bank's ward was a topic of comment.

Bacon, who was accounted by one and all to be a great lady's man, and a decided favourite wherever

he went, made bold to venture that he intended to carry off the prize, if she proved "worth the candle."

Rodgers protested that he then should enter the arena as Bacon's adversary; and if the heiress was fond of flowers, his vantage-ground was secured in advance, for he was sound on botany.

Kingston vowed he didn't care a button for all the callow pinafore darlings in Christendom. They all remonstrated, "Why should he? He was betrothed." For his part he intended to pay his devoirs to the baroness, or, in a pinch, to Miss Longstreth.

To all this Drysdale laughingly decreed it the better part of wisdom to wait and see which way the wind blew before setting sail on any such piratical expedition as the capture of an heiress *nolens volens*. As for himself, he was too well pleased with his bachelor estate to allow a vagrant Cupid to put shackles upon him, especially in such an unlikely game of chance. Besides, he did not believe in any American setting his cap for a French woman. At this point *d'appui*, his friends were thrown into a state of wildness, and prodded him ruthlessly with their provoked nonsense.

"She's an American, Dick! you're hedging!"

"Well, well, Dick, *plus on est de fou, plus on rit*."

"Richard—lion-hearted—don't, pray don't show your claws so soon in defence of your quavering heart."

"Take courage, you've an even chance, aye, and

the odds in your favour. You're a deuced sight better looking than anyone in our crowd."

"Laugh away, my merries, you know the adage?" retorted Dick, "I'm no tyro!"

"But, Dick," jibed in Jasper Rodgers, "you know it's proverbial that the ladies like a *mauvais sujet*, so we shadow your chance, and as for me, I haven't a rival on that score."

"Go on, go on, put your precious necks in a noose. I shall be glad to be 'shet' of you all. You're a bad lot," interpolated Dick, whilst their raillery rattled about his ears like bird-shot galore.

"Dick, you're a tremendous swell, and a capitalist into the bargain; pray do have compassion on us poor beggars of painters. Let us try our luck with the heiress. We'll do you a favour if fortune's wheels are ever cogged against you," said Kingston, who ever sought an opportunity to air his word tricks. And as his companions laughed heartily, he could not resist the sport—hit or miss—of scattering more of the diminutive sugar-coated pillules. "Then, Master Richard, brave and fair, you know it would be just your glorious mission to inaugurate a picture gallery, a sort of Anglo-American Grosvenor, to display in *line* all Edith Longstreth's '*doves*,' and give our poor insignificant *daubs* sky-room."

Good-naturedly Dick took their pleasantries, once in a way putting in a rebutting quip, keeping their jollity in full swing till they reached their hotel.

During the intervening days their nonsense was

unabated. When Wednesday came, they frankly avowed it would be difficult to deport themselves becomingly, or free from embarrassment. However, in the face of their inbred aptness and *savoir faire*, this assumption was merely a parting sally, before properly falling into line of march, like well-drilled Love's Crusaders.

In all London perhaps there may not be found a more palatial residence than the noble mansion of Baron de Sillvermann. The velvety lawn, with its ever green, deep, springy nap, spread out softly, as a lovely tapestry, over the triangular space before its superb façade; the mammoth vases, overflowing with brilliant flowers and interlacing festooned vines and ferns, were in strict keeping with the air of *largesse* that spread over the whole estate. A full view of Green Park on one side, with a glimpse atween the foliage of Buckingham Palace, filled the plebeian minds of all flunkies with the reverential feeling that, if this was not the domain of royalty, it was verging close to it. There was over all a suitable yet unostentatious pomp *en règle*, and nothing offended by a flaunting, vulgar flourish of over-muchness.

As the young fellows drove between the colossal pylones, and bowled around the carriage road circling the lawn, Jasper was much struck by the magnificence.

"By Jove!" exclaimed he indiscreetly, "this is a gala night for maulsticks and palettes! I wish I'd brought my sketch-book. Ned, I'll pull out of the

arena, resign totally my chance, if you will pose at the shrine of the heiress, while I memorise her in an auriferous atmosphere !”

“S-h-h-h !” whispered Dick, fearful lest this bantering might be overheard.

He had barely silenced the flow of nonsense in time for them to be assisted to alight from the halted carriage.

They were ushered into the baronial hall by four periwigged flunkies, liveried in white brocaded satin coats and knee breeches, wearing pink stockings gartered with rosettes below the knee, shod in enamelled pumps with silver buckles studded with brilliants, and gloved in spotless white kid.

The ceremonious and gracious deference with which these attendants received the guests conspired to put them at their ease, free from astonishment or embarrassment, for—they were not Philistines nor Anglomaniacs—it was the right ceremony in the right place, which they accepted in good form.

A tessellated pavement flooring the vestibule was a veritable Roman mosaic, the ceiling a fresco by Durant. The ponderous rosewood doors were carved in bold arabesques, radiating in graceful sweeps from the centre-pieces, consisting of the coat-of-arms of Baron de Sillvermann. Watteau and Gobelin tapestries depended alike from all the walls of the halls and rooms, excepting the library and smoking-room. The former was adorned with unique, magnificent, Cordova-leather hangings,

representing "The Triumph of Mordecai," and furnished with embossed and *repoussé* leather. And the smoking-room had been decorated by Eugène Lamy, who had excelled himself in the spirited manner with which he here reproduced many suggestively lively incidents of the Carnival of Venice.

There were some choice old family portraits painted by Flandrin and Ingres, and modern examples from the brush of Cabanel and Meissonnier. Among the miscellaneous pictures were rare canvases by no less celebrities than Rembrandt, Velasquez, Rubens, Guido, Van Mol, Bordone, Reynolds, and Greuze.

Corners were occupied by cabinets filled with rare bits of diminutive *chef d'œuvres* from the workshops of Della-Robbias in ivory and *faïences*, Petitot's enamelled work, velvet-lined cases of Blankenberghe's Saxony porcelain, the veriest china gauze, exquisite bottles blown and cut by that celebrated artisan, Gonthières; and here and there interspersed, rare examples of Boules and Rieseners, inlaid chiffonieres and chairs, all tending to grace this sumptuous interior. Upon the broad hearth-stone stood a full complement of Caffiere's brasses, glittering with ruddy reflections from the crackling fire, which seemed to temper the damp, chilly atmosphere.

A grand Erard pianoforte, beside which stood a large beautiful harp, caught the eye upon entering the multiple drawing-room, which evolved spaciouſly.

Everything was luxurious ; but, all in all, every appointment seemed in perfect harmony with every other garnishment of this establishment. It was all of a piece. Nothing clashed, nothing offended. Singularly enough the thing that most impressed itself upon the beholder—who possibly held in memory, and involuntarily contrasted the spectacle of countless other magnificent interiors—was the prevailing bright genial tone of the ceilings and carpets and hangings, elegant in the extreme, thick as a board as to texture, but the colours were never heavy or inartistic. All so cheery and inviting, without a single tawdry article, or aught that was incongruous, be it for use or ornament. Vases of costliest Sèvres, such as are usually preserved in emptiness on show, here on the contrary were charged with a profusion of exquisite flowers massed in single colours. This arrangement was so artistic, that the distinctions of the yellows, reds, and whites blended beautifully,

There was a touch, an air of enjoyment pervading the atmosphere, unmistakably imparted by the denizens, who thought nothing superior to their personal wants, and that taste was the better part of a thing of price.

A book in a rose binding, *une édition de luxe*, was held open by a jewel-hilted Persian dagger laid between the leaves, to mark the recent reader's place. Chairs were drawn in juxtaposition, not apparently to break the monotony of arrangement, but as if just quitted by the occupants who might

have been a moment previous engaged in sociable conversation. Thus was softened the rigour that might even have consistently matched the majesty of these lofty salons in this opulent mansion. And so it is these Israelitish magnates revel in luxury, when they have the inbred taste and culture, as do none of their Gentile rivals.

Baroness De Sillvermann made an attractive picture in silver greys, as she gracefully reposed on a fauteuil drawn cross-wise, in a little off-set at one end of the salon, her long sweeping robe of pearl grey *duchesse* satin billowing about her shapely figure like a moon-tinged sea, as she played with a couple of frolicsome Yorkshire toy-terriers, at the risk of ruin to the lovely Mechlin lace garniture of her sleeves.

The guests were announced.

Putting the pets aside, she advanced to extend hospitable welcome. The spoiled impertinent pets, unwilling to be discarded on such short notice, set up such an uproar, their shrill barkings utterly dominated her voice. Unable to down them, she motioned the servant to take the miscreants away, and they whimpered dolorously in humiliation, as they paid the penalty of their disobedience.

Smiling at the absurdity of the incident and situation, for the callers stood like puppets, their bodies bowed very low, hats in hand, awaiting her salutation, soon as might be she gave the signal. "Gentlemen, I apologise heartily for this canine tempest in a tea-pot. Allow me to bid you heart-some welcome!"

Scarcely a moment elapsed before the two daughters entered, followed by the *bank's ward* and Miss Longstreth. Then came the baron, breezy and bustling, as one who was making up lost time. A general interchange of a few insignificant cordialities had turned the cold edge of formality, when dinner was announced.

The host arose, addressed his guests: "Mr Drysdale, you will attend Baroness De Silvermann; Mr Bacon, my daughter Lady Helena; Mr Kingston, my daughter Lady Fanny; Mr Rodgers, Miss Longstreth. Miss Cornéille,"—the young fellows pricked up their ears,—“we will proceed;” and taking the *bank's ward* on his arm, led the way to the dinner-room.

Dinner consisted of a perfect *menu*, served to perfection. As the baron detested wearisome spreads, it was not too long nor too elaborate. After dessert, the customary retirement of the ladies permitted the usual half-hour of selfish mannish freedom. They smoked, sipped a glass of *fin champagne*, conversed upon divers topics of the day, each cautiously, if at all, descanting upon the political crisis; told a story or two, which hurt no one, but amused all.

Soon the host led the way back to the drawing room. The ladies were vivaciously chatting full of animation, and, if not actually engrossed in each other's society—dear humbugs—their dissimulation was perfect.

Clarisse Cornéille, “the *bank's ward*,” as Baron

de Sillvermann persisted for the quaint *nuance* in denominating her, possessed a charming personality. She was of medium height, well-developed figure, graceful and lithe as a sprite, an ideal type of golden hair, lily and peachy blonde; noticeably large hazel eyes, dark abundant lashes, and delicately pencilled eyebrows; a small mouth, full vermilion lips, which offset her brilliant fine teeth. Although she spoke English with fluency, it was not entirely free from an accent, or, strictly speaking, an inflection that made the *timbre* more than otherwise attractive. She was endowed with a certain spirit of vivacity, a freshness and joyfulness ever and only imparted by exuberant health and a sunny temper.

She exhibited a charming *elan* and unreserve, without pertness. She listened, or talked, or laughed with enjoyment, but with utter selflessness; original in thought, but not opinionated; an unspoiled child of nature, whose youthful simplicity and candour, education or worldliness had not yet warped.

At a moment when enjoyment seemed to lag, the baroness requested Miss Cornéille to sing. She arose with obedient affability.

"Madam, the baroness, knows I sing only as an amateur, and without professed skill. One is not taught to be an artiste in a convent. What shall I sing, madam?" Making this half apology she had crossed the room to the piano, and now stood with all her soft fluffy lace draperies crushed about her,

as she turned on herself to address the baroness, and awaited her mandate with bewitching grace.

“Miss Cornéille, I think your voice is particularly adapted to melodramatic or pathetic styles of music. I like any selection from your operatic repertoire,” —the girl hesitated,—“or a gipsy song; there you have a wide range from which to choose. But, can you play your own accompaniment?” suggestively asked the baroness.

Instantly Dick stepped forward, proffering his services as accompanist.

“If Miss Cornéille will first permit me to run over the music to get the melody, pitch, and time, I’ll do my best.”

Clarisse selected the lament of a zingara deserted by her lover. As she sang she warmed up, giving vent to her fervour. She threw herself into action, and her gestures gave play to her marvellous conception of the gipsy’s fierce passion and subsequent heart-broken lament. Her eyes flashed, her movements revealed the contour of her figure in myriad poses. The displayed qualities of her florid voice proved it to be, as the baroness had opined, a dramatic soprano, of full, rich volume, wierdly pathetic in its middle register. She seemed inspired. Her listeners were wrapt in admiration. At the finish she was praised in an extravagant manner, and urged to sing again.

She consented conditionally that they all emulated her willingness by joining in some melody without solos.

They could but consent. After shuffling over a huge stack of music, something suitable was selected. They derived no end of fun from their futile endeavours to sing in tune and keep time without rehearsal.

When this performance was concluded, she turned to Jasper naïvely.

“What a delicious quality of tone your tenor possesses ! It reminds me of the voice of another painter I am acquainted with, but he is no longer young, and his voice has not your clarion ring. He taught me how to sing. Probably you know him by reputation. Count De La Rue ? He received his title from the Empress Eugénie, as a competitive prize for a celebrated picture, that I am told had a history ; but *on dits* are not always oracles of truth, so I’ve been taught. He never personally mentioned either the picture or the story to me, but he did train my voice.”

“A service for which, Miss Cornéille, if you will permit me to arrogate an opinion, every person who ever has the coveted pleasure of listening to your voice, will be extremely grateful,” gallantly offered Jasper Rodgers, as he kissed her hand with Continental mannerism.

“I thank you.” She inclined her head without a touch of coquetry or conceit, then drew nearer Dick, who had not left the piano-stool, to compliment him on his pronounced success as an accompanist.

“Mr Drysdale, it must be very difficult to

accompany off-sight, voices you are not familiar with? I should make a disgraceful *fiasco*."

"Now, Miss Cornéille," spoke up the baroness, "favour us with the song of songs, in my estimation—*Mia speranza adorata*—instead of fatiguing your vocal cords, complimenting the gentlemen."

Again, as a volunteer in her service, Dick accompanied her with great taste, for he knew the music perfectly. She excelled her previous effort. A shade flushed by the excessive adulation poured upon her, she was not quite at ease. Eager to escape further attention, she arose and seated herself beside the eldest daughter, Lady Helene, and found relief from conspicuousness in urging her to play on the harp.

The request was politely reiterated by the guests. "It would afford them such extreme pleasure." White lies!

Lady Helene digitated a bewildering example of pyrotechnical instrumentation on the harp, before which she attitudinized in such fashion as to display, beneath a sweep of draperies, a decidedly shapely foot. She flourished her hands and arms as she threw her head back, slightly averted, with face upturned in an imaginary and practised seraphic pose. Lady Fanny accompanied her on the piano.

The marked trip-hammer precision of time, the stolid, conscientious, unsympathetic rendering, without deviation, inflexibly according to the score, showed, if not genius, a fine mechanical training that transcended personality in matters of interpretation.

Every string was pulled, every combination of chords thriddled ; crazy *arpeggios* whisked over the surface of the palsied instrument ; *piano, mezzo, forte*, then all simultaneous, or with such precipitation that it so seemed, making the massive frame vibrate in an ague of sound, and the performer's bosom swell with the mighty exertion !

The equally belaboured gymnastics of the pianoforte obligatoist, truly presented in unison, hammered out examples of what work and soulless perseverance can effect !

It was their show-piece. They had toiled at it like true Britons for ten years, to play it with the precision of clock-work, and as debutants in society, had just begun to torment the tympanums of helpless listeners. For at least five years would this be repeated, and repeated too with unalterable fidelity ; when, if not before, matrimony in all probability would claim these so-called gifted creatures, as good as their weight in sound sovereigns. As it is not customary for women to play after marriage, peace would possibly reign till their own daughters were foisted upon society in the same manner.

The polite humbugs applauded without stint, even pronouncing the musical feat most marvellous ; but in the minds of the present guests, *that music settled* the young ladies of the house of Sillvermann. Jasper Rodgers some time after summed them up with dubious politeness to his companions.

“They are deucedly high-bred, very talented ;

oh, yes, but somewhat constrained, modish, and too unimpeachably conventional, like ten thousand of their class."

On the contrary, taken as an antithesis to these formulated young ladies, Miss Longstreth was a decided character, *sui generis*,—a type, physically considered, she herself pronounced "a mongrel, a hybrid between a brunette and a blonde."

Nationality she seemed to have none that she cared to nurture. Born in Louisiana, when a mere prattler, because of the "little unpleasantness" between the north and south she was brought by her parents to Europe, and educated in France and Germany.

She was indulged by this doting father, who from the time of her mother's death had pampered her most injudiciously, and at his death left her with a fat income. The principal he had wisely invested, so that nothing could ever transpire to disturb it, unless the bottom dropped out of the world. She had, previous to her father's death, traveled with him around the world, and was by natural sequence an out and out cosmopolitan.

He had been proud of what he gloried in terming "her manly accomplishments and good, hard-headed common sense." She had been constantly surrounded by his men friends, consequently had grown up familiar with their sports and many of their customs, and had acquired a broadness of thought thoroughly masculine. She was a fine horsewoman, an excellent shot, and fenced well, could swim, and skate, and manage a boat; in

fact, loved all out-door sports that gave her freedom to exercise muscles and limbs, and blow the cobwebs out of her brain.

Through long propinquity to men she had imbibed a desire to have some legitimate occupation in life, like a man, that should have a monetary value, and she was as proud of her own successful venture in the arena of art as any man could have been in any business enterprise of even greater magnitude. The money she earned by her brush, she called her "*scrupulous fund*"—it represented her worth.

This young woman was utterly free from the mooted lackadaisical nature of a southerner. She possessed very decided ideas and theories of life. Inductive, no doubt, from her varied observation and untrammelled association with men, she had not passed along through life's highways and bye-ways, cross-cuts and circuitous paths, without experiencing some degree of sorrow, and keen acrimonious disappointment. Work was her solace, and her motto, *Labor omnia vincit*.

"What!" she was wont to say, "sink down when struck, with folded arms, and bemoan until the tide of utter wretchedness rises high enough to swallow me up, or the turbid stagnation stifles me, and all trace of returning steps are lost in the mire, and no beacon to give hint of an advance stronghold? Oh, no! not I! . . . Give me time to catch my breath, time to sense the situation, despite the hurt, I will try to struggle

up on to my feet, obstinately bent upon overcoming my own weakness; strike out, make directly through the wrack, cling to and carve my way up the craggy cliffs overshadowing my 'sea of trouble.' And again, if propitiously warned by a forecast shadow, if I know the worst, then I right about, stand with a bold front to meet the coming disaster, armed with determination *cap-à-pie* to conquer or die in the contest. One don't always succeed, but honest failure is not defeat."

Evidently she had read her lessons clearly and understandingly out of the great book of life—the world.

There was a steely, star-like coldness and brilliancy in her eyes, betokening an ambitious nature, capable of great steadfastness, and absolutely one that never flinched. She could gaze at the sun, or watch the flashing lightnings without blinking.

Withal she was not mannish, nor did she assume a certain horsy dash that some young women, who have cleared the first hurdle of small social orbits, are apt to adopt; adopt, too, in the mistaken notion that such an assumption adds a certain air of independence to their personality, forgetting—if they ever knew—that strength of character can be as intensely feminine as masculine. No true woman seeks to enfranchise herself from womanliness.

Granting that Edith Longstreth courted success, it was never at the expense of her womanly dignity.

She adhered to good forms with almost religious tenacity, being essentially refined. A certain *chic* and elegance of dress, setting her well-rounded figure off to perfection, proved her to be, not indifferent to womanly vanities.

Her strong, nervous hands were quite as expressive as her face and mien. Edward Kingston, who had been a close student of D'Arpentigny, could not take his eyes away from them. He had a craze for analysing the hands of fresh acquaintances, to determine in his own mind strains of character, as he believed, otherwise obscure to him.

At an opportune moment, when the rest of the party were busy conversing, he remarked in an undertone to Dick :

“Just look, Dick, at the flexibility of her tapering fingers, with their blunt tips, they drop in perfect curves ; then see the strength in the cushioned muscles of the thumbs and underside of the palms ; watch the glowing colour of the fine skin, and the full throbbing veins ; see the lustre and shapeliness of her exquisite nails. Those, Dick, are indices enough for me. I read her like an open book. *She's* a woman worth knowing.”

She never appeared to lightly touch or carelessly finger aught, but rather to grasp firmly everything she encountered or took. Her hand-shake—if indeed she shook hands, for she was very much averse to the custom indulged in promiscuously—was such a firm, hearty grip, as might have done credit to a

modern Vulcan. But this young woman's great attractiveness to all observers was an easy bearing, her equipoise and command of herself, attended by a graceful action in all her movements and gestures, and an admirable carriage.

Jasper Rodgers said, "She's deucedly well put together. She can afford to be unconcerned ; she's too deep for me by a jugful. I feel like a blooming idiot when she darts her eagle eyes full upon me, and opens up fire. Her bookishness involves too many diverse topics I haven't two thoughts about, when talking to women. I prefer the dolly-fool girls, by a long shot to the clever self-assertive breed of nondescripts, who are quite as unsatisfactory in actual life as would be *Hypatia*. They're abnormal. . . . I imbibed the old-fashioned doctrines of St. Paul's teachings in my mother's milk, and the mutability of the so-called progressive age, has not caused me to assimilate a new faith. Women should be strictly ornamental, and hold their tongues on affairs of state or learning in the temple."

The young men had made polite but futile efforts at conversation with the young ladies of the house of Sillvermann. Probably some friction or national prejudices unintentionally cropped out, thereby holding Lady Helene and Lady Fanny aloof, by an unaccountable yet masterful antagonism. However, their conversation was utterly tame. When not absolutely in monosyllables, every theme essayed dwindled down to the measure of a few sentences, lopped off effectually with "Just fancy," "So tire-

some," "The nasty weather," "Awfully good in you to say so;" hence the young men were not fierce to prolong the one-sided confabulation, in their foiled attempt to draw the aristocratic turtles out of their shells.

On the contrary, Baron and Baroness Sillvermann were most charming, versatile, and adaptable. Theirs was the very quintessence of cordiality and hospitality, without the slightest taint of condescension. They both possessed the almost extinct art of inspiring in others powers of conversation. They led their guests up to fields of thought, and adroitly drew each one out of temporary reserve. It impressed the observer, as an invitation to dance, to sing, to play, which could not be refused, even though one was ignorant of all three; and yet, under the inspiration of, particularly the baroness's winning, encouraging manner, one might surprise one's self by making a successful attempt, and, although a novice, feel unabashed by personal awkwardness or dulness, because her radiant smiles beamed upon them.

Oh, rare and perfect host and hostess, who ever took such ceaseless pains to afford to one and all the meed of pleasure, that should prove most agreeable to each guest's personal inclining.

"To have the honour of bestowing ever so small a pleasure or enjoyment upon a guest, is a great boon I always covet," was the baroness's constant rejoinder, when guests in taking their leave thanked her.

"If you have been happier because of this evening, *I owe you thanks, not you me!*"

Inadvertently, Edward Kingston said in response to a query as to his being in love with his art :

"I have always thought I made an irretrievable mistake when I turned my back on literature for art."

This was the cue for the Baron to take him off to his library.

Apart from the faultless array of books necessary to equip an extensive private library, Baron de Sillvermann had scoured all the noted book marts, and had retained many celebrated bibliopolists to glean for him certain folios. However, his particular fad turned his attention to the attainment of old engravings and prints, whether torn out of the volumes they once illustrated, or in the old books intact. With pride he displayed several enormous tomes, bearing the imprint of a Dutch publisher, much over two centuries ago, containing illustrations of all sorts of hideous and ponderous war-engines, instruments of torture, and arms and armoury not only for men but for horses and elephants; a rare volume of Diogenes Laertius, two of Polybius, and several of Herodotus, all in a state of fine preservation.

He took from one of the shelves a copy of Josephus, opened it, to make some comments on certain passages which are eliminated from many versions. Every margin was closely written over in red ink in Hebrew characters, observing which, Kingston asked :

"Baron de Sillvermann, have you any idea who the commentator was?"

This tickled the Baron's vanity like a fluttering feather, and he smiled with the air of a youth when praise is brand new, not as a man of the world, sated and more or less inured to all life's good things.

"Ah, Mr Kingston, doubtless you will denounce me as a vandal for profaning the temple of learning! The marginal notes are mine!"

Unlike most bibliomaniacs, Baron de Sillvermann had the leaves all cut, and took a real pleasure in the contents of his literary antiquities and curios. He had no sham egotism in the mere possession of his literary love, because it provoked the envy of some competitor, or was worth so many pounds, shillings, and pence. At any moment his familiarity with their contents made him equal to a thorough dissertation upon their subject matter, and classification. He was quite frank in declaring that he scarcely knew in *belles lettres* the names of a dozen modern authors, or the titles of their books.

He found Edward Kingston not only appreciative, but a man with marked similarity of taste to his own, in respect to books, and one who had made some pretentious *finds* in original manuscripts, and even was about to publish a monograph on his fad in reference to *head* and *tail* pieces, as the only safe authentic means of establishing the identity of certain publishers' works, or to denote the personality of the ownership of special copies.

"Book-plates, Baron de Sillvermann, is my craze, whether they be modifications of crests, monograms, shields, scrolls, with names or mottoes engraved or written within them. I spent two years rummaging musty, mildewed, worm-eaten volumes, in perfect rat-holes, to gratify my humour. I found many extremely ornate, even fantastic and roccoco, arabesques, cornucopias, gargoyles, cherubs, cupids, birds, and animals—sometimes outrageous designs. I rejoice to witness the initiatory in a revival of these old-time devices has been taken by some publishers."

And so to the echo these two men agreed. Finally, Baron de Sillvermann, with deference to his other guests, was prompted to considerately end their chat.

"In conclusion," he said, as he shoved back upon a shelf a mammoth tome, "Mr Kingston, I pray you don't misapprehend me. Not that the old necessarily should be better than the new, but I personally like to dwell upon distinctive epochs that produced one genius at a time, who became the epitome of his age. Into his work he blended in one grand totality, as an intellectual microcosm, the needs of all classes. Now-a-days, we have too many pretenders with a distributed mediocrity."

Kingston could not resist the prompting of his republicanism.

"Ah, Baron de Sillvermann, that is because you old Continent people hug your aristocracy, and seek to hold up lineal caste as the unsurmountable line of demarcation. Is that not so?"

“Quite to the contrary, as far as I am concerned. Rather a satire on your opinion, stands the fact that from Mammon was the lineal descent that gave to my own family their distinction and titles. Then there is your own Henry M. Stanley, a self-made man of destiny, whom I personally regard with the greatest respect, and bow down to with true admiration. His plain ‘*Mister*’ signifies more to me than any feudal title of duke, or conferred estate of sovereignty or nobility. Fine, noble man that. His ambition seems to have been guided by an exalted estimate and sense of personal duty, and that duty has been quickened by noble humanity, charged with deep sympathies and profound knowledge. He truly represents a genius that must be immortalised for heroism as well as historical fame, far above the succession of old Continent nobility. But, mark you, there is *one Stanley*, and *only one*. However, let us not enter upon a dissertation which has no beginning and certainly no end in its ramifications.”

They both rejoined the group in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER VI.

EDITH'S THEORIES.

“ In all that she said there appear’d
An amiable irony. Laughingly she rear’d
The temple of reason, with even a touch
Of slight scorn at her work, reveal’d only so much
As there gleams in the thyrsus that Bacchanals rear,
Through the blooms of a garland the point of a spear.”

AS the baron and Kingston returned to the vivacious circle, they were the targets of a copious volley of mock indignation from the ladies. Their hubbub was silenced by the baroness inviting her guests to repair to the supper-room, where a toothsome collation awaited them.

“ I cannot fancy,” she said to the baron and Kingston as she led the way, “ that you two gentlemen are æsthetical enough to dispense with material refreshments for the sake of a Barmecide feast, even though served *à la Cinque-cento*.”

Once comfortably disposed at table, Baron de Sillvermann addressed the gentlemen as a party.

“ When do you sail for America ? ”

“ Probably within a fortnight,” Drysdale promptly responded.

“ Then,” resumed the baron, “ Miss Cornéille

may possibly go at the same time, that is, if I can induce Mr and Mrs Bleecker, whom she is to accompany, to fix upon a date that will conform to yours. It certainly would be less forlorn for her to have the congenial society of a party of young people, than to be immured with a middle-aged couple across sea, albeit they are in this case, most delightful persons."

Dick sprang precipitously to the fore as spokesman.

"Oh, for the matter of that," he eagerly said, "we can, I'm sure, waive our date to any time during the month to accommodate their plans. We are merely on a pleasure trip. Besides, if it were otherwise, Miss Cornéille as companion voyager, would be a guerdon that would more than amply compensate for serious detention." Dick was becoming effusive.

The young lady was not a mummy, and could but be obviously affected and delighted with Dick's emphatic manner. Her pride flushed by the flattery of his out-and-out compliment.

Henry Bacon, with an assumption of interest, turned blandly to Miss Longstreth.

"Are you not, Miss Longstreth, going also?"

"That depends, Mr Bacon, upon a variety of circumstances not altogether auspicious."

"Have you any objection to submit to us," he glanced at his three friends, "what you regard as stumbling-blocks, or inauspicious? For, in our midst I feel confident we might devise expedients

potent enough to overcome them." His tone, his manner, his assumption, were unusual for him. If he was sincere, he was angling in uncertain waters; at least, so thought his intimates.

"Bravo!" burst out Baron de Sillvermann. "Chivalry has in you and your compatriots brave specimens."

The four young men instinctively and simultaneously rose, made a graceful bow:

"We hope to merit it," "Thank you," "Thanks," "Thanks, you flatter us," and reseated themselves, when Bacon again looked towards Miss Longstreth.

"You perceive we are in the field at your service."

"That's a venturesome, blindfold offer, placing you at the mercy of a capricious woman,—for to men's minds all women *must be capricious*,—however, you may recant," replied she.

"Steadfast to the offer, I refuse to recant. Command me."

"Well, Mr Bacon, do you think I can have as much latitude in America as I do in Europe, where everyone who knows me humours my heresies? Strange to confess, notwithstanding I possess a fearless sort of courage, yet I timidly shrink from being misjudged."

Edward Kingston ventured to suggest before Bacon could collect himself sufficiently to answer:

"Miss Longstreth, you might not find your position as an independent, free-thinking young woman quite so conspicuous, or your honours so undivided

in America, for in no country are the women so thoroughly enfranchised as there. I assure you it is nothing remarkable for the *crème de la crème* of young American women to seriously embrace a profession or launch out as amateurs. There is at present a general movement in that direction—a species of epidemic. I personally must avow but little faith, that the *dear sex* is, as a rule, actuated by any better motive than a desire to be the observed of all observers.”

“There! there! Mr Kingston, treason!” interrupted she. “That’s just like a man’s insular estimate of women’s motives. I denounce your unfairness. It aggravates and stirs my soul’s spleen to have my sex eternally put upon by foregone masculine condemnation!” Miss Longstreth had warmed up to a state of excitement, but checked herself suddenly, adopting with admirable tact an indifferent tone, and she accosted Mr Bacon again. “Do you agree with your friend?”

“Yes, and no. All my ideas are far too abstract for clear delineation. Fashions are ephemeral, and women, the world round, are accounted to be fashion’s devotees,” so he hedged with levity.

To this Baroness de Sillvermann spoke up with quiet mien.

“Will you permit me, Mr Bacon, to say that in my observation I have seen more men hoodwinked by fashion, and dancing with reckless, dizzy changes to her most fickle novelty, than so-called light-headed, frivolous girls!”

The ladies all twittered in exultation, and the gentlemen gave vent to sighs and moans to manifest their woeful plight, and appeared about ready to surrender or retreat.

“Really, this is too bad. I did not aim to institute myself dictator or umpire, and I must insist that the conversation proceed between the original participants.” The baroness, all smiles, subsided into a muteness not easy to break through, and gave her attention to the silent amenities, she, like a true English hostess, excelled in dispensing, without disturbing one iota the continuity of any conversation.

Miss Longstreth seized the lance first.

“Pray, tell me what mainspring actuates you lords of creation?”

Mr Kingston, feeling somewhat prodded by her query, essayed a quick rejoinder, but she continued :

“Pardon, but let me first announce my opinion, lest your honest contrition leads you to admissions that may divest my penetration of some of its wisdom. First, to get a living, if must be. Second, because a profession or business is allotted and impartially granted to men, whether they possess *auri sacra fames* stronger than aught else, or simply ignore idleness. Third, to lose yourselves, and pass the time, when yachting, polo, racing, hunting, billiards, cards, and all the fooleries of a superficial existence cloy upon you, then, as a bulwark against the ills of society you seek other

occupation, you '*go into business.*' Fourth, overweening vanity, and unquenchable fondness in being a marked man if successful, and, in consequence, to be looked up to as a superior being, regarded by the lesser mites as a man of influence, to be cultivated and patronised, because you have the power to crush them, or make them, or that the jingle of your money bags is as divine music to their mercenary senses. Seldom—of a class of the sex, not of an individual do I speak—do you pursue a career, take up a course of study, or indulge in '*a craze*' after the ideal beautiful and good, with the sole purpose of enlarging and ennobling your manhood, or to disseminate unselfishly a benefit to your fellow beings. . . . You do not live in earnest, although under a high pressure you pant in a common race, free to all, I grant—dicker and squeeze, worst your competitor to better yourselves in a material way. Ah, you cheat yourselves with your half-heartedness, and fritter away your years, until it is too late to make reparation. Then, by one of those singular perversions of human nature, you fall to denouncing and cursing all the rest of creation, because you have made a barren waste of your own life, that is bitter and in the end detestable to you."

She paused to sip her wine, but her intent to proceed was felt by her listeners, for the momentary silence remained unbroken.

"Now, with women, if the bread-and-butter grind is out of the question, we often fret over the hum-

drum banality of our feminine, of our permissible occupations. We may love ourselves just a trifle more than one of the suitors who have vowed ardent protestations into our ears, or on the other hand, if we have no suitors, we cannot or may not with self-respect calculate on matrimony with any certainty. We have opinions of our own, yet being the recipients of our parents' bounty, if our opinions are radically contradistinct to, or clash with their views, we feel a humiliating sense of restriction. . . . We may refrain from expressing them, but these ideas may be dearer to us than the immunity from earnest struggle which the home shelter furnishes, with its measurable amount of coercion. How many men strike out for themselves through home differences?"

"Precious few, I fear," answered Bacon.

"Personal independence," she resumed, "to a capable woman is a trait no sacrifice is too severe to make to secure. . . . We seek work for another reason—we like to create something. A German philosopher called this motive the maternal instinct latent in every female. Yet for all that, we may not possess domesticity. We often like the realisation of personal power that the qualification to execute work brings. We crave freedom, insuring the right to go and come as a man, unquestioned, and without feeling compulsory dependence upon any one; or at times we are forced to deception in an effort to conceal our distaste, or screen our preferences from prying eyes. We have sufficient *amour*

propre to detest a false custom that often is a bore to the helpless men who are our relegated escorts. Put all this out of the question, every girl becomes more of a woman, with the aim of some motive to spur her on, and every woman a grander, more sympathetic, more sterling woman because of work. Aye, she becomes a more likely companion for a worthy man, should she marry; and should she be defrauded in—as society terms it—*her legitimate sphere*, or bereft in other ways, she can build for herself an invincible refuge, wherein her life may be blessed with its daily fruition, and find shelter from the sullen clouds of utter uselessness, that morbidly press down upon the victim, to stifle all of brightness or hope in dire melancholy.”

She again paused to slake her thirst, for her voice had become dry and husky, but no one spoke. All eyes were rivetted upon her, absorbed in her spirited ideas. Naturally she resumed:

“Should she not require the wage of her work, I hold to the belief that she ought not to depreciate the labour that may be vital to some other less fortunate woman, by doing it for nothing, or, as my father used to say, ‘*by crowding her out by glutting the market.*’ . . . Again, the higher and more illustrious her social position the nobler her act, for she sets an example—*sets the fashion*, as you might say, Mr Bacon—to those feeble-minded enough to deem themselves degraded through *necessitous labour*. She imparts her personal dignity, gives a royal stamp of sterling worth to the nobility of

labour. Finally, her ambition, her genius are on a par with man's ; but these I refrain from entering upon, for I have already given too free rein to my hobby, spurred on by your respectful patient audience. I fear I should ride rough-shod over you till Doomsday unless I cry a halt !”

Baroness de Sillvermann gently said: “ I glory in your spirit, Miss Longstreth ; but my dear girl, do not become a misogynist or a misanthropist. One is so apt to be carried away beyond all reason by such ideas, and become fanatical.”

“ I hope not in my case, madam. For whereas I despise human littleness and narrow-mindedness that run in a rutted groove, I especially condemn misanthropy, and regard marriage as sacred, indeed, too holy for generalisation—I simply adore an exalted, magnanimous, broad condition of human nature. I even find consideration for an out-and-out barefaced, bold crime ; whereas, I should be tempted to order a *grovelling sneak* or a *liar* to the *scaffold* !”

At this juncture, Baron de Sillvermann vouchsafed :

“ My dear Miss Longstreth, your views impinge upon an autonomic state ! I affirm, if you will allow me to Anglicise the pat German phrase, that any woman, however clever and gifted with executive powers, without a good prime minister and a well-organised parliament would soon make a ‘ *mish-mash* ’ of any government !”

A general and hearty laugh ensued. This was the Baron's successful coup to dismiss the topic.

Just then, as though awakening from a dream, the bank's ward bent across the table.

"Then," she said in a half-whisper to Edith, "I must work or be a mere drone, a mere parasite, according to your ideas? I fancy I should like to exercise the power you spoke of as inspiring some women, so I'll be an opera singer."

This was too much for Baron de Silvermann. He broke out in a deprecatory tone:

"Now, now, my young rebellionists, *do not* be totally absurd! You'll disorganize my peaceful family if you keep on. Helene, Fanny, don't you also want to work?"

"No, papa, we are only too glad to be out of school, and done with long, tiresome hours of study and practice," dolorously replied Fanny, who was not quite so lymphatic as her sister, who followed pathetically.

"The awful practice." The young men cast sly glances at each other, still cringing under the memory of the result of that *awful practice*. "That was work enough. Then, papa, we have no time in the season, and out of the season we have already too much to do," finished she with a long-drawn sigh.

"Surely, you will admit that Lady Burdett Coutts is an admirable business woman, and some members of your family, my dear Nathan, have certainly distinguished themselves as women financiers?" said the baroness to her husband, as they all left the table.

He shook his finger, first at the baroness, then more menacingly at Miss Longstreth.

"You see, Miss Insurrectionist, your firebrand has ignited the very heartcore of my household!"

Profuse in expressions of appreciation and delight, the young men took their departure in admirable form, each one feeling that the evening must be calendared as one *to remember* in the future.

Jasper Rodgers, who had been strangely reticent all evening, was the first to break silence as they drove to their hotel.

"By Jove, that Miss Longstreth is an odd stick!"

"A trifle eccentric, perhaps, for a young woman educated in France and Germany. You must credit her at least as being utterly free from affectation," spoke Kingston, in a tone of defence of the young lady.

"That's all right, but I adhere to my point. It is deucedly strange she should be so erratic. She's a devilish fine-looking, stylish girl, rich and all that, so it cannot be she has flown off at a tangent in consequence of some love affair or social slight. I say, Kingston, she let you have it fair and square, eh?"

"Not at all, Jasper. What I said was a decoy to call the girl out. Her fearlessness carries out what I divined from her hands, don't it, Dick? She grasps every difficulty by the nape, as if she had to deal with an obstreperous child, who might

bite and wanted to kick. Dick, come, confess why you soured on her ? ”

“ On the contrary, Ned, she captivated me, and I cried out for quarter while my heart was whole.”

“ Oh-h-h, the traitor ! the traitor ! ” said Bacon. “ How about Philomela ? Dick, you’ve either the instincts of a Mormon, or else you’re as fickle as the wind. We will give you one minute and thirty seconds to the tick, to put in a disclaimer.”

“ Harry, your effrontery is rich. Don’t you realise that as a piece of mortgaged property, you have no right to criticise us, or to be philandering about under false colours. I, for one, think the moment a fellow is engaged, he should be labelled in some unmistakable way, and consigned to suffer a penalty if he interfered with free men ! ” retorted Dick.

All this superficial chatter was but as the surface ripples dimpling a quiet sea, when a vagrant ærial sprite flutters over it. Each one of these men, deep down in his own heart, felt the quickening of sentiments he sought to cover up and disguise to the others.

CHAPTER VII.

HOMeward BOUND.

“To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day.”

THE young men adjusted their date in order to return on the same day with Mr and Mrs A. Tuttle Bleecker, in whose custody Miss Cornéille was to voyage. At the last moment the entire party were more than delighted to ascertain that Miss Longstreth had concluded to go also.

Mr and Mrs Bleecker proved a decided acquisition instead of a hindrance to the young folk's entertainments. They were ready to fall in with every newly concocted pastime that in any way contributed to the general fund of enjoyment, and thereby managed to keep in abeyance all of Mother Grundy's tattle.

The number of this little party made them entirely independent of other passengers. Their devotion to each other remained a problem unsolved to the end by those outside of the charmed circle. Verily these young people crossed the Atlantic under most propitious circumstances. The weather was most delightful, notwithstanding the prophecies

when they embarked for blustering gales. Every hour was enjoyable. Had one amongst them a single qualm of sea-sickness, the disagreeable fact was not alluded to once during the voyage. One day lapsed into another so swiftly, the time was all too short. They sketched, sang, read, and talked with a goodly amount of lazy dalliance, that one must indulge in if seeking to know the full enjoyment, the special enjoyment of a voyage.

The constitutional promenades, when the rollicking breezes played pranks with the ladies' garments and tresses; the timid and reckless wagers about the daily log, how many sea-gulls, or whales, or porpoise, or crafts would be seen; the speculations as to the number of the pilot boat; the hanging over the balustrade looking down upon the steerage passengers dancing and gaming, were each consecutively engaged in with the zest of the genuine traveller who never grumbles, but takes things as they come, and foots it all up in his book of experience as so much to his credit.

Dick's interest in Clarisse had grown rapidly. Not that he was admittedly in love with the girl, but she interested him thoroughly. She was truly in a formative state of mind, like a lovely bud about to blossom out in beauty in time. She said so little about her previous life, which was rather unusual in Dick's former experience with young girls, especially at sea. "Was she merely reticent?" "or secretive?" were queries which came unbidden, and which he kept striving to decide in his own mind,

One day, when amusement lagged, an irrepressible Yankee, one of the restless, nervous, active individuals, who are reputed to sit up nights to get ahead of their fellow-creatures, made a wager, free to all, that he could ensnare a sea-gull with a reel of linen thread.

He was almost coughed down by the male passengers, who had wearied of his incessant attempts to play the social mountebank. At this particular moment he was in special disfavour through having perpetrated a shameless practical joke upon a very illustrious professor of philosophy, who had been seriously befooled into making an absurd blunder by this *Uncomfortable's* sharpness.

However, he freely declared he "was not to be boycotted" nor "sat upon" by the men. He circulated familiarly among the ladies, soon to enlist their interest, and educe from them positive expressions of their amazement and incredulity, as well as eagerness to witness the trial.

Clarisse, with child-like simplicity, kept asking him: "How is it possible? Are you not, Mr Cypher, playing one of your jokes upon us?"

"My dear young lady, 'tis a fact, I declare; I'm in dead earnest," he answered. Taking a reel of linen thread from his pocket, he began to unfasten the end. "And if you'll lend me your assistance, you alone shall accomplish the deed. If you'll step aft with me, we'll secure our snare to the flag-staff, and await results."

Clarisse hesitated. Dick was frowning, Mrs

Bleecker looked askance. She appealed to Edith for support.

"Will you come too?"

"I've no objections," replied Edith, "but we must make up our minds to be laughed at by everybody."

This expression was enough for Mrs Bleecker. She rose.

"Very well, Clarisse, we will all give you countenance by our presence. After all, it passes away the time, and may prove a novel amusement." Dear little lady, ever dispensing saving proprieties, and never seeming bored or reluctant.

Mr Bleecker's parting shaft sent them tripping away in great glee.

"Great Neptune! what a pack of Simon Pure zanies! You've no balance to lose, or I'd caution you not to fall overboard!"

Seeing this rather exclusive party move away with the *Uncomfortable*, many of the other passengers made a stampede to follow them, but were unceremoniously checked by the officer on the bridge roaring out—

"Only six at a time on the turtle-back! Stand away, there; stand away!"

Mrs Bleecker, Edith, Clarisse, the *Uncomfortable*, Dick, Henry Bacon, and one sailor held their places, while the crowd settled back on to the main deck; a throng of disbelievers, just ready to burst out in derisive shouts at the failure they fully expected to witness.

One end of the thread was securely wound around the flag-staff; a number of long lengths floated out in the breeze in open loops, fastened to and across the first attachment; then the *Uncomfortable* baited an extra long length of the thread with some crumbs of egg yolk boiled hard, which he had taken the precaution to provide himself with at the outset. This done to his grinning satisfaction, he instructed Miss Cornéille.

"Now, Miss, unfurl this guy; permit it to float on the breeze so, drawing it slowly in, and letting it out so," he suited action to his words, "and hold it below, if possible, the other loops, until a gull attacks it, then flirt it upwards so, in order that the loops shall hit its wings, and you'll have a bird!"

At these words a concert of guffaws agitated the unbelievers.

"I guess," he Yankeed, "we had better clear this deck, Miss, and leave you alone; the birds are mighty shy."

"No, don't! pray, don't, Mr Cypher. I shall do something wrong, and lose my bird! Pray, do stay, Mr Cypher, and help me!" spasmodically screamed Clarisse, who was already in the true novice sportsman's spirit, and feeling the terror of *buck blindness*, for a gull had been swirling in wide circles about the thread snare for a moment or two.

However, the others retired back to the main deck, leaving *Uncomfortable* as Clarisse's mentor. . . . Several birds hovered in perilous proximity.

Clarisse was alert and quick as a cat to obey his whispered instructions. Once the toil almost held an unwary venturer, but the *buck blindness*, fatal to all novices, deluded her. She jerked the guy-thread too quickly, missed the bird, a great "Oh-h-h-h!" emitted from the open-mouths of the gazers. Poor Clarisse was wild under the nervous tension of her present occupation. *Uncomfortable* cautioned her to "*keep your hair on, Miss,*" gave a few additional charges how to entangle the bird, then drew aside to await results.

Soon the birds returned, cawing in a harsh, discordant manner, evidently much concerned about the fluttering bait that they greedily hung over, ready to pounce upon when they felt it to be safe.

Interest had converted the scoffers to the belief that it was at least barely possible that the thing might be done, but hardly probable.

A young bird swooped down. This venturesome gullkin snipped and snipped, darting away and returning to the bait. Clarisse dropped her guy-thread, *Uncomfortable* like a flash seized the entangling loops of the floating snare, and the luckless, struggling bird was drawn with pinioned wings on board, amid shrieks of joy from Clarisse, and wonderment from the spectators!

The almost imperceptible weight of the thread upon the upper surface of the bird's sensitive wings had caused it to lose control of them, and the wind-snarled meshes were sufficiently strong to retain the powerless, affrighted bird.

Clarisse was almost frantic over her ultimate success, the whole procedure was exciting and novel. *Uncomfortable*, was more than ever puffed up with bragging egotism, and, if possible, more ubiquitous than ever.

A general wish was soon abrew that the experiment had failed, rather than that this blow-hard *Uncomfortable* should have had the chance to go about crowing like a triumphant cock when the hen's cackle announces a new-laid egg. He became insufferably officious and intrusive, snubbed in the end by everybody.

Such men have no sensitiveness; they are *biped-rhinosceri*, which nothing hurts or curbs, and possess a blind assurance that nothing can intimidate. They always travel first class, pounce upon the very best, elbow themselves every place, talk above every person else, try to take the initiative. On shipboard they plunge across the deck to tuck the ladies' rugs about them, point out the most desirable spots sheltered from wind, in or out of the sun; join, one after another, the promenaders; know every passenger, at least by name, within eight-and-forty hours after sailing; often more than useful, more than kind; generous to a fault, yet, notwithstanding their intrinsic goodness, they are systematically and characteristically *uncomfortable*.

Poor Clarisse, ever after the bird-capture, used to peer wistfully around the corner before she would venture out of the companion-way on

the deck, for the moment Mr Cypher spied her, he would bolt towards her regardless of appearances, sometimes leaving abruptly some one he had engaged in conversation, throw up his arms wildly—

“My sweet angel! where shall I put your chair? Let me assist you. Do have my rugs and cushions.”

Finally, Mr Bleecker suggested to *Uncomfortable* that he was altogether too demonstrative, and that the ladies of his party were most fastidious observers of conventionalities.

“Oh! I see, Bleecker, you don’t want me to be civil to your ladies?” he shouted, loud enough for the neighbouring passengers to hear.

“You have interpreted my meaning exactly, and I must insist that you refrain from future annoyance,” coldly stated Mr Bleecker, turning on his heels and walking away from the *Uncomfortable*, who had plunged his hands deep into his trousers pockets, straddled his legs wide apart, evidently calculating to brawl out his opinion of “Old man Bleecker to his teeth,” but had reckoned without his host.

This snubbing proved effectual, so far as the Bleecker party were concerned. Immediately afterwards he instituted a series of petty, although aggravating performances under their very eyes. The fruit and other dainties he had before been in the habit of bestowing upon them, he now distributed with great parade to the vulgar women of a cheap variety show,* whose chairs he took great

pains to plank down within ear-shot of the Bleeckers; then he would talk *at them* at the top of his brassy voice.

Soon he tired himself out at this dodge, and sought elsewhere for amusement, not because he felt their repulses with any spirit, nor that his course was to him *infra dig.*, but his irrepressible nature chafed under restraint. Hence he sought more active diversions—played shuffle-board, tug-of-war, tossed coppers, bought shares in all the pools, played poker, sometimes winning, sometimes losing, but *played fool without a rival*.

Unfortunately there is no law against these *Uncomfortables*. They always have travelled, they always will, for their race is far too prolific to ever become extinct; indeed they spring up like mushrooms in every country. You cannot “bet that they are Yankees,” nor can you safely say “they are English, you know,” but that they *are foreigners* to the best, the most refined elements of well-bred society, and should be hooted down as insufferable nuisances, goes without saying in every language the world over.

The evening previous to landing, the steamer was skirting the shore, the lights were visible on Coney Island, and the rockets were bursting in showers of blue, green, red, and flame-coloured stars from Manhattan Beach. The passengers were agitated by the usual excitement inspired by the approach to the destined port.

“I wish there was no to-morrow,” Clarisse said

in a half-sad tone to Dick ; “ this is like a dream or a fairy scene.”

“ Why ? ” asked Dick. “ For all to-morrows may bear a strong semblance to the to-days, if we wish it so to be.”

“ Perhaps. But, Mr Drysdale, you do not know how *triste* is my position. *Par exemple*, I am coming to a strange land, to strangers who are hereafter to figure in my life, and may have some right to control my actions. For, I have never seen my guardian, although I was eighteen last June. Stranger too, Baron de Sillvermann told me I might be in New York a month before meeting him, as he was absent from town on business. It would have given me great pleasure, you must know, to have at least been welcomed in person by some one who loves me, or is interested in my welfare. You cannot blame me if I feel sick at heart over the enforced coldness of my reception. The Italian and French people with whom I have been brought up, are so effusive in their cordiality, that I have sometimes even felt the ceremonious coldness of the English hard for me to get on with. But, Mr Drysdale, this kind of indifference on the part of my guardian, seems too much like neglect, to endure without a sigh.”

“ Never mind, Miss Cornéille, we will try to help you bear your cross. I for one hope to mitigate in some small measure the regret you may experience on this score, if you will accept my most devoted homage.” Dick was tempted to say what was

uppermost in his heart, but checked himself through an innate sense of propriety. It was taking the girl at a disadvantage, at a weak moment, when she might misinterpret her own feelings. . . .

He wanted to ask the name of her guardian, but was far too delicate to evince inquisitiveness. Clarisse, in her veritable gratefulness for Dick's undisguised sympathy, said feelingly, as she looked him fair in the eyes :

"What have I done to deserve your friendship, Mr Drysdale ?"

"Lived to be known." He paused. Dare he, ought he, to say more ? He yearned to do so, yet he hesitated—it was too late !

Up came Mr Bleecker from the saloon to hustle the young people below, to pick up all their belongings, and see that their hand-baggage and wraps were all together, for they were to land to-night.

The voyage was at an end. They were all better acquainted, and a genuine good fellowship had grown up between them as a party, as individuals, by the time they landed at New York.

They disembarked in excellent spirits, with interchange of invitations and acceptances for speedy reunions, *sans cérémonie*.

Richard Drysdale found his uncle, Herbert Severance, absent from town when he arrived, therefore instead of complying with the understanding that he had come to with his uncle, after many upbraidings, to live with him when he returned from Europe this time, he was necessitated to establish himself

pro tem. at his favourite hotel. Here he was greeted on all sides, from the cordial proprietor to the burly porters, as a much esteemed client.

Fancy Dick's delight to receive, in the course of the next day, the following note:—

“DEAR DRYSDALE,—Our home comforts are sadly disturbed through the defective condition in which we find the plumbing. Repairs are absolutely necessary before we can safely occupy the dwelling.

“This brings me to request a favour at your hands, knowing you have friends at court. If you can secure at the Victoria, suitable accommodations for my wife and self, the two young ladies, and our attendants, we will come at once.

“Answer per messenger if convenient, and believe me, dear Drysdale, yours truly,

ALGERNON T. BLEECKER.”

“*Friday Morning,*
WASHINGTON SQUARE.”

Dick lost not one moment in button-holing the proprietor, Mr Hoyt. He took a *coup d'œil* of the situation, quickly saw that his long-timed client particularly desired for some personal reason—oh yes, the young ladies, of course—to have his friends inmates of his hotel. This was enough for him. It should be done. He possessed the ingenious faculty of impressing every guest with the flattering idea that their individual comfort, happiness, and interest were above all entitled to his special consideration, and that his hotel was their house.

Dick was enabled to send prompt reply.

“MY DEAR MR BLEECKER,—Have arranged to the best of my ability. Enclosed find scale of prices, &c. Call and consider personally.

“My compliments to the ladies.—Yours to command,
R. DRYSDALE.”

“*Friday Noon, VICTORIA.*”

In due course the Bleecker party were cosily installed. Through their desire for seclusion, they arranged for a private table in their own apartment.

Dick was not, then, to be as fortunate as he had dared to hope. The vagrant idea had in truth floated through his brain that when they came to the hotel, the unreserved steamer life would obtain.

However, the restrictions were not so rigid but that he was frequently the Bleeckers' guest at table, and daily paid with all decorum—considering the prying eyes at every corner, in every corridor, of every hotel—his formal devoirs to the ladies.

Thanks, to the blessed independence of American customs, and thanks, to the fact that none of this select coterie were Anglomaniacs, he not infrequently escorted the young ladies to the opera or theatre. For here a man, judged by his personal demeanour, is taken for a gentleman on parole of honour, and is not insulted by the ignominious European suspicion that treats him as if he were a varlet, needing the closest espionage lest he commit some depravity that shall contaminate or smirch the purity of a young

girl,—a custom throughout the old world that makes all social mingling for the unmarried, stilted and ungenial, depriving young women and men of the *haut monde* of a free companionship, that is conducive to frankness, freedom, and true-heartedness, removed from dissimulation and intrigues.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR SWEET CHARITY.

“ We'll revel it as bravely as the best,
With ruff, and cuff, and farthingale and things.”

“ You with your foes combine,
And seem with your own destruction to design.”

MR and Mrs A. Tuttle Bleecker were most lovable and considerate in every conceivable way to their young girl charges, never for an instant lagging in their solicitude for them ; in truth they tried to make each successive day pleasanter and happier than its predecessor for these two light-hearted natures.

No wonder that they were about the most popular and available couple to all the young people in their extensive set in New York society. They never scowled upon the so-called frivolities of youth, for, as Mrs Bleecker was wont to say :

“ What was once in the long ago to me so enjoyable, although only a matter of passing fancy, no real staple to life's bare necessities, a mere illusion, I can yet feel has an irresistible fascination for the young. And I do not propose to make myself a crabbed old dame, going about trying to lop off

these harmless superficialities, to be detested, and voted an unwelcome terror, dreaded by the young people whenever I put in an appearance."

Nor did she. Every girl or youth who sought Mrs Bleecker's connivance when they were on the eve of perpetrating an *outré* action, or got into a scrape of any kind, always did so with the foregone conclusion that if she could possibly, she certainly would, lend her sanction, in any case would strive to avert the wasps which buzz so many stinging scandals.

The fellows called her "*a brick*," the girls "*a duck*." She, herself, claimed it a privilege to be counted as one of them in all their jollities, and as their means of salvation when they came to grief. She strove to live a life in common with them, beyond the haphazard of harsh misunderstandings, whenever she sat in council to weigh their motives. Her temper was even and mellow, never jerky or Aprilish. In her nature surely the leaven had not soured. Sunny, adorable little lady, why is your name not legion? You and your kin have a much-neglected mission to perform on earth, to stay the underhand intrigues of the evil-minded, who ever distort the gambols and gay banter of the inconsequent joyous ones, attributing innocent acts too often to the outcome of unworthy intent.

Edith Longstreth these days devoted much time to her easel. She secured a studio among a perfect nest of painters of both sexes, and was fast becoming a favourite, indeed was quite *à la vogue*. Her

Sunday afternoon and evening receptions were thronged by the wit and talent of the day, consisting largely of those who, according to the jargon of the *bon ton*, were denominated "the select guild of Bohemia." These receptions were devoted to conversation and music. She was veritably in the centre of an intellectual throng, and seemed in her native element. Then, too, it was, Clarisse shone. She was besieged on all sides by admiring satellites, who urged her not to hide her talent under a bushel, but enter the lyric profession. She had memorised the soprano's *rôle* of several operas. She was moreover a born actress, it would be so easy, only a step.

Mr Bleecker, who was an old-time beau and genial dilettante, thoroughly appreciated *le mouvement*, and added verve and go to these artistic and musical gatherings.

When he was approached and pressed by a score of prominent women, to express an opinion respecting the propriety of Clarisse singing in character costume, at a charity concert then on the tapis, he expressed himself as seeing no harm whatever, if she wanted to. The salient point, much emphasised by the promoters in their argument, was, "The volunteers are all ladies and gentlemen of high standing, therefore Miss Cornéille's social caste would not suffer in the least. In fact, had not Mr Bleecker, himself, accepted some minor part?" How these adroit schemers insinuated their interrogatory wedges, and all for charity!

Edith, of course, was foremost and strongest in encouraging Clarisse, who only after all, hesitated because her guardian had not returned and might possibly disapprove. This objection was summarily vetoed by Edith and Dick, who were both ever appealed to by Clarisse when she was in doubt.

"None of your acquaintances," urged Dick, "can possibly trump a shadow of disapproval, inasmuch as Mr Bleeker is to participate; hence I should not suppose your guardian could find grounds for censure. He seems content to leave you without dictation to Mr and Mrs Bleeker's custody. Follow their advice, you can't go amiss."

"If you candidly think it modest and not forward on my part as a comparative stranger, and the youngest of the entire party, to assume the leading rôle, I will be truly delighted to sing. There is something fascinating in the idea! What will Count de la Rue say of his wayward *la petite philomela*, I wonder, when he hears about my doings?" Clarisse impulsively clasped her arms about Edith's waist, waltzed with her about the room, giving vent to gleesome ripples of subdued laughter; the personification of a blithesome child of nature, who was not ashamed to laugh and dance and sing when her heart was jocund.

Her hair tumbled down from its pinnings about her shoulders in a luxuriant mass of wavy, shimmering gold. Finally, the two girls flounced breathless upon a sofa, full of animation, their faces flushed by the exercise and excitement.

"There!" exclaimed Clarisse, "dancing is my safety-valve!" as she gathered her tresses hastily up into a knot, and jabbed an arrow through the disordered mass.

"I'm sure Mr Drysdale is shocked," said Edith.

"Quite to the contrary. It is charming to witness an unaffected out-gush behind the scenes, I assure you," protested Dick, his eyes beaming with admiration upon Clarisse.

The plan of the Charity Concert once decided upon, the most conservative society women pushed forward with indefatigable zeal, avowing their intent to make the enterprise a success at any cost. . . . Little three-cornered caucuses were held in drawing-rooms, devising ways and means to effect their purpose. The entire body of the officious which every society fosters, circulated here, there, everywhere, to solicit this, that, and the other for nothing, it being for charity. . . . Into every available prey's ears they poured eloquent words, designed to incite personal goodness, personal generosity in behalf of this *their* worthy object. Even Clarisse did not escape the sycophants' cunning flattery and charitable twaddle. They plied her artfully.

"So young, so gifted, so beautiful; what a lamentable thing it would have been to have withheld her aid. A ward that was to prove such a bounty to her suffering fellow-creatures! Did Miss Cornéille perchance know the amount of suffering there was in New York? No. Ah, it was just

as well she remained in ignorance ; the knowledge might eclipse her light-heartedness ! ”

Everything worked successfully to silence Clarisse's feeble protest that after all she was only an amateur and no actress. She had neither courage nor faith ; she felt she certainly would make a disgraceful fiasco.

No use ; her way was not hearkened to. Forthwith the practice and rehearsals began. Daily she was carefully coached by the peerless impresario, Maurice Strackosh. *La Traviata*, mainly because of the quality of her voice, was the opera selected. Once the project was fairly launched, she was neither lacking in aptitude nor fervent zest ; and Edith kept her spurred up without relaxation. Then, too, Edith's talent was called into requisition. She it was who designed the costumes. She had been implored to do so, and had no wish to decline ; however, she observed that the most pertinacious solicitors for funds and labour were too often the most niggardly in their personal donations or real assistance. Her fine open nature struggled hard to repress her opinion to these lobbyists ; but, she concluded, it did not much matter, they worked according to their own light, they laid out the roads, others must break the stone.

Dick's rooms were at the very top of the hotel, and he was a passionate lover of music. It was agreed among themselves that many of the rehearsals should be held there, in preference to their own rooms, in order not to disturb the other

inmates of the hotel. However, every one was on the *qui vive*. There was any amount of promenading through the corridors and halls, followed by extensive halts at the foot of a particular out-of-the-way staircase, and in front of windows opening into skylight wells, where the singing resounded with great distinctness.

Finally, the proprietor of the hotel was besieged by all of his guests to "try and persuade the committee to give one full-dress rehearsal in the spacious dining-hall of the hotel, to which we unanimously offer to subscribe liberally."

Through the daily newspapers the coming event had speedily acquired such wide-spread notoriety that the women not already in the affair were in a craze to enter as recruits to amass more funds, and be known "*as workers in the noble cause.*" Their vanity showed distinctly through the pet charity, but what matter so the cause be served.

How they pored over the papers containing their names in print, purchasing a dozen copies, marked with such a bold dash of red opposite their own names first, the worthy cause second. Indolent comfort-loving women who seldom breakfasted before ten o'clock, if so early, made their appearance at eight in the morning with their bonnets on, ready for a fresh start to waylay fresh victims with such an overpowering air of business, the men were put to shame. It was the revival of the Brazen Age. The Amazon army was curiously composed entirely of commander-in-chiefs. Every

one took the van. Each sniffed at the presumption of the others. The taunts, the bitter, unkind criticism and comment that brewed, made the family life of the poor men a little short of purgatorial.

The proposal which the amiable hotel proprietor was urged to make was at the outset scouted by the committee as utterly impossible. However, when he pointed out their short-sightedness in rejecting certain financial advantages to be gained, it was reconsidered in close parliament, and deemed to be a fine chance indeed to bring more golden pieces to their pot for *sweet charity*, and so the grand Mogulesses acceded.

This new element soon organised into several sub-committees, each stipulating in the beginning that they should not be interfered with by, nor have any connection with, the so-called outside, although original organisation, except to hand over the funds to those in authority after the affair was at an end.

Fortunately there was a clear-headed business man to adjust and classify the details of the hotel entertainment. He kept matters free from the confusion that would have inevitably resulted from interference and helter-skelter developments in every quarter.

Celebrated painters vied with one other in rigging up portions of the scenery. Combined devices resulted in the most novel and effective means of adorning the dining-rooms in a brilliant

and enchanting fashion, which tended to lend a bewildering attractiveness to the *mise en scene* without precedent.

Flowers were collected in waggon loads from every accessible quarter. Every friend or patron's conservatory was rifled. The countless columns supporting the walls of the first story and the dining-rooms were completely entwined with gorgeous blossoms and evergreens. The atmosphere was redolent with perfume. The drawing-room floor, with its succession of spacious rooms, was thrown entirely open to guests. The exquisite decorations were enhanced by the lovely multi-coloured crystal flowers which formed the globes enclosing the electric lights, showing midst the prismatic dangles of the cut-glass chandeliers. They looked like massive bouquets of luminous flowers.

One of the regular denizens of the hotel, anxious for the *réclame*,—a man this time,—who had amassed a fortune out of his patent for an electric fountain, begged the privilege of having the honour of contributing a specimen fountain, to be raffled for after the entertainment for the benefit of the charity fund. This was placed in the lower corridor, and sent glittering shafts of illuminated water up several stories high through the space formed by the circular marble stairway, splashing down again into the basin like tinkling showers of golden ducats, as if the contents of the money bags of an invisible Croesus had been tumbled out.

Everything was resplendent when ten o'clock wore round on this famous evening. The ladies displayed their magnificent toilets with supreme satisfaction, untrampled, uncrushed by a rushing crowd. The attendance had been limited to three hundred at ten dollars an invitation, not transferable, for there were no vulgar tickets.

A clique of young snobs—the king of the dudes and his ministry—a party of five, who had just returned from Europe the afternoon prior to the Grand Full Dress Rehearsal, were, in their own vernacular, “mad with disappointment because we can't go, y'u know.”

Nagged by the fellows at the clubs, the king of dudedom was nigh distraction to find the barriers up against him. His absence would be remarked. Finally, he bet five hundred dollars that he could get five invitations in spite of the lateness of the hour. So off he bolted, arms and legs more like dislocated pudding bags than ever, his walking stick grasped in the middle like a balancing pole, held the reverse way, his monocle set deep and resolutely in his eye—bolted off to the governing powers to state the situation, plead his case, and offer a bribe.

“I'll, by Jove! I'll give one hundred dollars each for the five invitations. And, by Jove! I'll toss the wager into the pot, rawthur than not go!”

Mrs Bleecker, as lady manager, protested that unfortunately the number authorised was long since exhausted, and that there absolutely could not be issued another invitation.

“By Jove! deuced rough, y’u know, to have such a cut, when we’ve just returned from abrawd where we’ve been awfully fêted. Always like to be in the swim, y’u know. By Jove! \$1000 will be a third of your present funds. Dear amiable Mrs Bleecker, do be lenient. Most aw-fully humiliating to be twitted by some of the *parvenues*, they’ve such a lot of gall—’t’aint fair, y’u know!”

Mrs Bleecker kept cogitating over the thousand dollars. She concluded to entreat the president of her faction

“Mr Hoyt, you know that you, as the president of the fund, have certain discretionary powers. Besides,” *sotto voce*, “a thousand dollars is not to be ignored. It has taken six weeks unremitting work to collect three thousand dollars, at an actual outlay of three thousand, five hundred, and ninety-eight dollars, and ninety-nine cents! Do say yes, pray do, Mr Hoyt, and I’ll take the brunt of it.”

The president rubbed his head. What he thought, in fine, will never be known. He *looked* like a man *who needed rest*. Graciously, as usual, he made a satisfactory decision, and turned to the king of the dudes:

“Very well, sir, we will accede to your proposition, in consideration of the fact that your absence hindered you from procuring the invitations in due season in the regular course.”

Of course the premium was not allowed to appear as weighing in the young swell’s favour.

Mr Hoyt proceeded to write out the coveted bits

of pasteboard, handing them to the conquering hero, who, in the glory of his conquest, put down as *quid pro quo* only five hundred dollars, and turned on his heels after profuse but hasty thanks. The president, perhaps only from force of business habit, quickly counted the notes, and spoke up loudly as the victor was disappearing.

"I beg your pardon, sir, you've made a mistake. You were to give us a thousand dollars!" and he displayed the notes.

"Hwh!—y-a-a-s—y-a-a-s, beg pard'n—deuced stupid, y'u know," and this parody of a man looked in confusion over his linen bulwarks, and wrote out a check for the deficit, which the president significantly collected before the bank closed that day.

The Full Dress Rehearsal was a novelty, "it caught on," and proved the *this year's* seven days' wonder of Gath. Thoroughly artistic, not in the least amateurish, it was the *ultima thule* of a New York "*elegant charity*," a new-fangled dodge in the hide-and-seek game of "beggar and almoner." And this side issue in no way deprived of its *éclat* the regular and first conceived public entertainment to be given a fortnight later, but, to the contrary, set everybody agog, and induced the would-be fashionables to attend, and they, with true human gregariousness, packed the Academy of Music from pit to dome.

Clarisse had assumed as a transparent disguise the *nom de théâtre* Julie Gautier. Her success, the excitement, the pleasure in flashing before an

enthusiastic public, out of the sequestered stronghold of convent, were delights carrying her far beyond her wildest dreams. Her brain reeled under the intoxication of the new experience. Everything in private life afterward seemed so flat and unsavoury, hollow as soap-bubbles, all individual compliment. She searched, and searched secretly, for a warrantable excuse to proffer her services for another estimable charity.

Life with occupation was assuredly imbued with a charm she had never thought possible. She inadvertently recalled to memory the wild ecstasy she had once felt, as a little child, when one of the old abbes brought to her a flower pot with just a wee twig of green thrusting up through the sod, the promise of a future growth. Hers, all hers. How she watched it, cared for it, moving it into the sunshine, sheltering it from the cold, watered it for months, when upon the leafed stems the buds unfurled into rich full crimson roses, and she plucked the first blossom! It had an intrinsic beauty and preciousness to her, because she had grown it; it was the fruit of her personal vigilance, of her unremitting care.

Recalling these childish reminiscences for the moment, and thinking that her recent success was all her own, her ambition, her hereditary traits thus burgeon with alluring thrill. Soon her thoughts strayed from their starting point. Now it was with paramount delight she thought of Dick. He was supreme, his love all the glory she craved.

If it had not been for this vital spark Dick had enkindled in her heart, she certainly would have followed an *ignis fatuus* upon the very quicksands, tempted by her present craving for excitement, and appetised by the flavour of the crumb she had nibbled from her *gingerbread world*.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GUARDIAN'S RETURN.

"This duty of right intention does not replace or supersede the duty of consideration."

THE winter had lapsed into spring before the proper reparations were satisfactorily finished, and the Bleekers could go back to their long abandoned home. Meantime, Clarisse's guardian, delayed beyond expectation, returned. After he had formally made the acquaintance of Mr Bleeker, who heretofore had been known to him only by name, and had consulted his lawyers relative to some legal documents, he called upon Clarisse with feelings of dread, yet impatient to have the first interview over.

He found her the pearl he hoped to, and was beside himself with pride and gratitude that it should be thus. Conspire as they had, all his inimical doubts were now set at naught.

Clarisse said rather chidingly to him, "I have keenly felt your long absence. Pardon me if I confess I have felt much neglected by you, sir."

He took her hands fondly between his, looking her in the face with tenderness.

"Ah, well, my child, you have a right to chide me. I have not been altogether considerate, but my intentions were the very best. It will be my hourly effort to make redress for the unfortunate circumstances which took me away just when you were to arrive. Believe me, it cost me bitter regrets. Do you know, little woman, I've waited to see you many, very many years." The words welled up from his soul.

"But why have you waited?"

"Circumstances have compelled me to do so. However, they're all past now. I hope you may be happy in this country, in your new life, in your new home. For the time being I must continue to encroach upon Mr and Mrs Bleecker's hospitality, and request them to shelter you and your friend a few weeks longer."

"Why?" in surprise asked Clarisse, with wide-open eyes.

"I am in the unlucky plight of living a bachelor's existence without any matrons or women other than servants about me, and it will hardly be suitable or in accordance with propriety to install two lovely girls alone with me; at least not until some matters are adjusted for your well-being and protection."

Clarisse chafed under this announcement. She yearned to realise the care and love of this man, whom she had been taught by the nuns to revere as a superior being, and to look upon as her only relative. Since she could lisp, nightly she had offered a prayer for his health and happiness.

"But if you are to be as my father," she murmured regretfully, "what harm, what impropriety can there be in my going home to you at once?"

"My dear child," he was greatly disturbed, "only the abiding and prevailing sense of decorum."

"Oh, if you only knew how I have longed to go to my own home, how I have counted the days making the weeks, the weeks the months, and the months rolling round into the years until I was eighteen, I don't believe you could keep me away from you because of *les convenances* one hour longer!"

She threw herself upon his shoulder and sobbed like a little child, while he, with his great ox-heart plunging and surging beneath the strain of suppressed love for this idolised girl, tried awkwardly to soothe her.

Her sunny disposition soon resumed its brightness, a mere cloud-burst had passed over her. All disappointments she had ever suffered were evanescent and purely emotional. The asperity of any sorrow, except perhaps the sense of her orphanage, had been warded off, and she had been spared even the dire feeling of any actual aloneness. There was just possibly a touch of humiliation in her recent lachrymose mood. Accustomed all her life to have every one cater to her most trifling wish, she was hurt and vexed that her guardian should have apparently evinced utter indifference to her existence.

"Ah well, my child," he said at the end of their interview, "time alone can prove to you what words fail to. In a short time in your own home,

surrounded by my friends, I trust you may find measurable substitutes for the life you have been compelled to leave behind."

"I came to you gladly, and left all of my friends without any compunctions. Then I have been taught to look forward to coming to you as the *grand affaire* of my life. I have looked upon all my education as a preparatory step to attain a life near you. The sisters at the convent have told me, that you, and only you, could tell me about my parents—about *my mother*—and this I am dying to know."

As she had talked, her guardian's countenance became very expressive of deep feeling, he knit his eyebrows, his lips were compressed, his eyes never wandered away from her face. At length, after a moment's silence, he addressed her :

"My child, I hope that you will care to call me, yes, that you will look upon me as your *father*, no matter what I may reveal to you some day. To feel that I had so lovely a daughter, who loved me, who leaned upon me, confided in me, would glorify my life, and open up to me in my old age a world radiant with bliss !"

"Yes ! yes ! I shall be happy to call you father ! Oh ! how happy I am already. I feel drawn to you as I have always dreamed I should be to a father." She knelt down in front of him, with the easy familiarity of an indulged child; she toyed with his fob-chain, archly turning her head to one side as though longing for a favour.

"You will take Edith and me home **very, very** soon?"

He nodded assent as he pressed her temples between his hands, kissed fervently her forehead several times, patted her shoulders. With scarcely a word more, he rose abruptly, and made his adieus, promising to see her soon again.

Once alone, she sat down, lost in a brown study. She did not hear Mrs Bleecker's approaching footsteps, nor did she seem conscious of her presence a moment after, till the dear little lady kindly asked her :

"Do you think you shall like your guardian, my dear?"

Clarisse started in surprise.

"Like him? I shall *love him* better than all the world!" then she relapsed into her meditative mood.

Mrs Bleecker, fearing something unpleasant had happened, for Clarisse was not given in her normal condition to fits of abstraction, thought to rouse her to a more joyous frame of mind.

"You know, Clarisse, that Mr Drysdale dines here to-night. It's almost half after six now, and you're not dressed yet." Diplomatic little lady, how easily she knew how to apply the ancient forms which in the long ago had stirred her from like lethargy. It was effectual.

"What a negligent creature I am, to be dawdling here when I should be dressed! Mrs Bleecker,

without knowing exactly why, and apart from the joy I have naturally experienced in meeting my guardian, I feel here," she pointed to her heart, "that this afternoon is an important epoch in my life. I have an impression—I feel something in the air! . . . Ah, well Edith will make short work of my ominous mood. I'll be dressed in twenty minutes!" Away she whisked out of the room, sprang up stairs, and burst in upon Edith, who was on the verge of descending to the drawing-room.

"Late again, Edith! Isn't it a shame? Dick will be here in no time. Oh dear, dear! I've such a budget of news to unfold to you; but it must be later on, for I really must dress in a twinkling."

Edith paused curiously an instant to regard Clarisse in her breezy excitement.

"Anytime, Clarisse, your budget will be welcome. Tell me, now, just one thing. Do you like your guardian?"

"Edith, he's simply adorable, and just as handsome as a picture!"

"Clarisse, do you think that he will sanction your attachment for Dick?"

"Bless my soul, Edith! I never mentioned Dick to him. Besides, I think it but modest to wait till Dick tells me himself. Do run away, I'll never get dressed if you talk to me; and you know how punctilious the Bleeckers are about our being punctual the moment the bell rings?"

"Look in the mirror, Clarisse," Edith exclaimed, as a parting shot, "your cheeks are quite as red as the

Jacqueminot roses you are to wear. Remember the song—*And love it was a rosy red; A bientôt mignonne!*”

The door was drawn shut with a bang after Edith, as a gust of wind rushed through the open window, and carried a photograph of Richard Drysdale from the dressing-table to Clarisse’s feet.

A conscious smile dimpled her cheeks, and a bright gleam shone in her brown eyes, a triumphant thought glimmered through her brain. In spite of her avowed haste to dress, she paused a moment.

Yes, Dick should yet be at her feet in *propria persona*.

Was it a vanity to glory in the dream, or was it a spontaneous hope of a passionate heart over which the wizard-hand of nature had struck a sacred chord, that would for ever and ever re-echo and fill her soul—like a dedicated temple—with the exaltation and religion of love?

The true and the false have so many similitudes, in honest search one is too often cheated in distinguishing one from the other. An innocent child finds pillowed mid the sedgy grasses, a shining, mottled wand; thinking how beautiful, his infantile brain still teeming with some nursery fabrication, or the Bible miracle of *Aaron’s rod*, he seizes it as a *treasure trove*; he knew it not to be a *snake* until it turned upon him, plunged its venomous fangs deep and with deadly viciousness into a vital part. So comes knowledge. Experience is *the snake*.

CHAPTER X.

SCORPION'S STINGS.

"In this mask of the passions called life there is no human
Emotion, though mask'd or in man, or in woman,
But, when faced and unmask'd, it will leave us at last
Struck by some supernatural aspect aghast.
For truth is appalling and eldritch, as seen
By this world's artificial lamp lights, and we screen
From our sight the strange vision that troubles our life."

DURING dinner Mrs Bleecker said to Mr Drysdale: "Miss Cornéille and Miss Longstreth, we regret to announce, are soon to leave us."

"Then I infer Miss Cornéille's guardian has returned?" rejoined Dick, incidentally adding, without pause for a reply, "To-morrow morning I am to breakfast with an uncle who has been as a father to me, and has just returned from a protracted trip. So you see, Miss Cornéille, I can in a way appreciate your feelings, for I shall see my relative for the first time since my return."

"Mr Drysdale," with pique spoke up Clarisse, "I'm not willing that any living creature should aver that they may measure joy with me! You must know it is the turning-point in my life to

meet my guardian. I never saw him until to-day, yet it has been my daily and hourly expectation since I have been old enough to remember."

"I beg a thousand pardons, Miss Cornéille. I assure you I had no desire to belittle your individual happiness, nor could I presume to suppose that my reunion with my uncle could equal your nameless delight in meeting for the first time one who has been your North Star!" The earnestness with which this was said indicated more than ordinary feeling, and put a damper upon the conversation.

Diplomatic little Miss Bleecker, always on the alert for squalls or embarrassing lapses, adroitly aimed a remark at Dick.

"Without a stretch of imagination, one might presume that you were growing cynical, Mr Drysdale, or else that you suspect Miss Cornéille of selfishly desiring a monopoly of happiness! Come, come, my young friends, we want *to give* as much happiness as possible, and *not measure* happiness to-night. I've invited all our steamer party here this evening to afford them the opportunity of congratulating Miss Cornéille on this climax of her romantic life, and I protest against aught that may detract a jot from our full enjoyment."

Dick cast a questioning glance at Edith.

"Miss Longstreth, may I enlist you in the service of my defence against my two conspiring foes?"

"Certainly, Mr Drysdale, with pleasure. Now

to begin my new *rôle* of Portia, allow me to suggest, in my judgment, you have a choice of two courses."

"Ah, that sounds refreshing." He eyed defiantly Clarisse and Mrs Bleeker.

"First, rather than enter into a lengthy and expensive litigation,—for it would cost you the forfeiture of a charming evening, wherein you should be condemned to sulk on the stool of repentance unnoticed,—that you plead *guilty*, and sue for clemency, because of extenuating circumstances; or else, as your second resort, assume boldly, without respect to facts, that your innocence has been unduly impeached, and demand damages, entitling you to the generous opportunity of *forgiving your foes!*" Her decrees, with penances, always against Dick, provoked great glee.

"Hear! hear!" shouted Mr Bleeker with gusto, striking the table with the handle of his knife and fork. Edith turned with mock severity upon him.

"Sir! such boisterousness is unbecoming the traditional dignity of the senior member of the *house of Bleeker*, and, sir, I must assume the painful duty of warning you, sir, should you, sir, again so far forget yourself, sir, I shall, sir, be obliged, sir, to commit you, sir, for contempt of court, sir!"

A general peal of laughter resulted, making the glasses upon the dinner table send back jingling echo. Edith was swept from her assumed dignity by the explosive merriment, and vainly endeavouring to get attention, cried out in a spasmodic staccato way, "Ladies! gen-tle-men!" then drawled

“La-di-es ! g-e-n-tle-m-e-n ! I forthwith proclaim a merry truceless war !”

Mr Bleecker lifted his voice high above the rest, “And I sound the tocsin of that war !” and began tooting through a napkin he rolled into a horn-shape :

“In heaven above, where all is love,
There will be no more sorrow there !”

All joined in the chorus, to the utter consternation of the decorous servants, who eyed each other with a comical distressed regard during the remainder of the dinner, as if the diners had taken leave of their senses, and that they, poor servants, were in imminent danger of becoming the victims of some eccentric act of violence caused by this sudden craze.

However, the nonsensical fun performed its own good mission, effectually restoring the participants to the most reciprocal state of good humour, and creating a fresh starting-point for a jovial evening. Mrs Bleecker chuckled quietly to herself at the felicitous turn.

As an adept in matchmaking, she had temporarily experienced a premonitory symptom of dread lest some jarring irritability in Clarisse’s present excitable frame of mind might make her fly at a tangent from Richard Drysdale, and spoil the fine combination she had been planning for the young couple during the past three months. Her clever principle in making matrimonial combinations was

to avert, always avert, rather than allow matters of petty difference to culminate, and then try to smooth them over. "Never, never, never have anything to smooth. It is bad policy," she averred.

Happy, contented, busy little woman, participating with so much soul in all the love affairs of the bevy of young folk she attracted round her! She actually appeared to re-live her own girlhood through the courtship of each and every couple who came within the radius of her observation.

Aunt Rachel Bleeker, as she was universally called, had saddled Cupid as her hobby. Her mission in life was to force the errant autocrat to send twain darts when he drew his bow. She spent no end of time setting up the companion targets within range of his sharp-shooting, clearing the field of interlopers, jealously warding off random shots. How she dwelt over the trivial confidences reposed in her by the girls, and coyly ingratiated herself into the secrets of the young men. How she cozened them! Sitting down for a *tête-à-tête* in cosy retirement, it was her wont to draw them out of their reticence.

"Now, tell me all about it."

This most indefinite invitation was usually effectual. Most lovers merely needed a vague hint from this craftswoman that perhaps she knew something intimate from words expressed to her by his *Dulcinea*, something indicative that his ardent love may not be distasteful. And so it was through

this shadowy conviction that they opened their hearts to Aunt Rachel. Hence the little woman managed to keep *en rapport* with the progress of their love affairs, aiding when she could, in conscience, to bring the lovers together, chaperoning the girls when contingencies arose, championing the young men when they deserved it. She worked all her combinations according to a principle of her own. Concerning the idea that two people were *true affinities*, born for one another, she believed that the subtleness of *propinquity* was, as a rule, all things being equal, only necessary in the course of events to bring about a match between the *right*, and also, too frequently, *the wrong* twain. With all her earnestness in this respect, she was very far from indulging in the most remote indelicate obtrusion of various people in the society of each other, but with infinite tact, when *it ought to be, caused it just to happen*.

On several occasions she had befriended more than one pair of mistaken lovers by helping them to cut the formidable Gordian knot of an unsuitable engagement, that must have otherwise unavoidably resulted in an incompatible union. She had so adjusted the snare, that instead of a degrading quarrel, resulting in subsequent revilement of each other, the freed individuals ceased to be lovers by becoming admirable friends, frankly admitting that they had found out their mistake, through her help, in season to prevent unhappiness.

“False pride, and what terrible Mrs Grundy

might say causes more unhappy marriages, is at the root of more repugnant misalliances than aught else in all the world," was her dictum. "A man or woman commits an inexorable blunder, to conform deliberately to a plighted troth, when they have one, or the other, or both, discovered that they are mistaken. It is sheer madness! It is a lie! It is a crime! It may prove the vilest degradation, and may result in a fierce tragedy or in a burning scandal," she argued.

Most unsparing was she in her contempt for the sickly, puerile sentimentality which affects some girls like a rage, making even a pure, delicate-minded girl recklessly avow love for either a worthless lout, a brutal fellow, a sot, a loafer, or any renegade from a true order of manliness. She lectured such deluded ones soundly. Equally strenuous was her rally-cry for the defence of a man against himself, who blindly sought to make an alliance with some namby-pamby girl, or sooth with some woman who was either his inferior or incompatible through various causes. She always scouted the idea that a man's honour being at stake, prevented his breaking like bonds when he saw his folly. His honour required his honesty in the most vital step in life. Her Cupid, far from being an ill-conditioned tyrant, was noble and ennobling when properly enshrined.

Soon after dinner, Kingston, Rodgers, and Bacon arrived in exuberant spirits. The incessant hum

of voices sounded like the buzzing of a swarm of blue-bottle flies, now and again intermingling with spurts of contagious laughter; a little lull, then the buzzing would augment. Presently Clarisse's voice was distinctly heard above the others, and, as she continued to speak, although her conversation was addressed to Jasper Rodgers, the attention of the entire group was directed to her.

"I do still insist that the partial opinion of interested friends, Mr Rodgers, cannot be relied upon. I dare not believe myself possessed of unusual talent, or I should be a simpleton. No, no, it is a shame to puff me up in egotism, and try to turn my head by so much flattery!"

Rodgers hung over the back of her chair with a suggestive familiarity, while she had turned half round and faced him, forced by his attitude to look upwards and over her shoulder.

"Believe me, Miss Cornéille," he said in a low tone, "that of which I am trying to convince you is the honest, unprejudiced criticism of the very difficult Strackosh, as well as of that eternal grumbler and everlasting fault-finder, the so-called Zolearan—Halburt Springer." He looked at her curiously. "Miss Cornéille, I think, with these men in your train, you should heed as truth, not flattery, the universal mandate."

"All this, I confess, is most tempting, Mr Rodgers, but to adopt a profession necessarily entails all sorts of complications. I should have to find a manager. Above all, and firstly, I should

have to gain the sanction of my guardian ; then to fit myself properly, I must commence an arduous system of drill and study. It takes a lot of time, nerve, and adaptability in spite of the latent talent I may possess."

"There is Mr Drysdale," he said with caustic insinuation, perceiving that the others were listening ; "I fancy you, if any person, could make terms with him to become your manager. Am I correct, Drysdale ?

"I can only answer that I should have to coach myself up on managerial business in order to do Miss Cornéille justice, or presume that I was a likely applicant for such a post of honour." While Dick spoke, Clarisse had scrutinisingly eyed him, and retorted the instant he finished.

"There ! Mr Rodgers, you hear even Mr Drysdale politely sneers at me ! Come, be fair with me, Mr Drysdale." She approached him, relieved to get away from Rodgers. "What do you seriously think of my taking up the lyric stage as a profession ? Do you think that my vocal and histrionic gifts, if I have any, bespeak success ? Don't hesitate to speak frankly. You cannot wound me half so much by blunt frankness as by misguiding me with false encouragements."

"Honestly, Miss Cornéille, I believe you would eventually have an unparalleled success, if you put your soul into your study ; but the drawback, in my estimation, is *the life* of a professional career ; it would be so cruel and hard for one of your sen-

sitive, refined nature. The vital question in my mind is whether it is worth the immolation of yourself."

"Pray, don't carp, Mr Drysdale," stingingly interpolated Edith. "Don't, pray don't handicap Miss Cornéille's aim in life with imaginary detractions. Perhaps you regard all women professionals as social pariahs?"

"Ah, Miss Longstreth, that is foreign either to my speech or thought. You fail to consider that I am rendering an opinion on parole of honour, and not flourishing an *ignis fatuus* to misguide our mutual friend."

"I beg your pardon for my stupidity," she stiffly said.

"You see that I impolitely refuse to be indoctrinated with your woman's rights convictions, but I can be gallant enough to say, whereas I cannot forswear my belief that a theatrical profession for some women robs those same women of their noblest estate, I modestly offer the sentiment as merely my personal view, and do not proffer it in a didactic spirit, and I may be foul of the truth. So, pray, exonerate me from all sweeping denunciation on your part as to my motives."

Bacon spoke up at this juncture.

"I declare, Drysdale, you're too frank. Whatever has come over the spirit of your dreams, that you should back-water on professions for the fair sex?"

"Nothing, and I specify the theatrical profession.

I never had the same question put in the same direct manner as put by Miss Cornéille, and I feel taxed to utter my candid opinion. In the past I have talked at random or in a cursory fashion on general principles with nothing at stake." Jasper Rodgers glanced at him as he uttered the last sentence, and a vague sneer played about his mouth. "However, I make the *amende honorable*. I proffer my services to Miss Cornéille to act in the capacity of manager, and use my most diligent efforts and influence to make her career—should she venture a social exodus—a brilliant success!"

Edith fairly boiled; Clarisse was flushed by Dick's homage.

"Miss Cornéille, allow me to write a libretto for an opera for you, and I'll guarantee a sensation!" said Kingston with mock braggadocio.

"Foh! fee! fy! fo! fum! How about the ogre of a guardian; my young architect's in air-castles! *I'll guarantee*, like Mr Kingston, a *sensation* for Miss Cornéille when he discovers all this plotting. Take my advice, and wait until you consult the powers that be," jocosely said Mr Bleecker.

"As a lover of the present," chimed in Mrs Bleecker, who dreaded the young people getting at counterpoints, "I might suggest it would be renewed evidence of Miss Cornéille's greatest, best, undisputed accomplishment, her amiability, to sing for us."

This stroke was parried skilfully at the right

moment, for there was a disturbing undercurrent moving, and every voice was raised to urge the much-discussed Clarisse to accede.

Drysdale conducted her to the piano, as if it was in his legitimate province, and an entitled right.

After the music, Drysdale could not avoid evincing annoyance over Jasper Rodger's disposition to monopolise Miss Cornéille. He was simply furious when he overheard Jasper say in an undertone:

"Pray, give me the privilege to pay you the first call after you are established in your own home?" At the same time, turning his back to the others, he leant over her, under a pretext of arranging a rose that he professed he thought was about to fall from her *bouquet de corsage*, and touched her with almost indecent familiarity.

Through the blushes caused by the annoyance, she smiled, spoke with delicious naïveté so that all might hear, and forsook her chair to avoid him.

"On the contrary, Mr Rodgers, I shall receive you all in the most formal *en règle* manner one week after I am settled in my new home, and, to forfend against intruders, Mr Rodgers, I shall not give one of you my address until a few days before the event." She walked deliberately away from him towards the others, who were grouped in the middle of the room, addressing them in a provokingly laughing way.

"Just think what a sorry prank Mr Rodgers tried

to make me party to, by way of a joke upon you three gentlemen !”

They all exclaimed with avidity :

“ What is it ? ”

“ Do pray tell us ! ”

“ Glad you are loyal to us ! ”

“ What a rogue ! ”

Meantime, Rodger's face blazed crimson through rage, and with ill-concealed vexation he appealed to Mrs Bleecker.

“ Madam, do you think it is quite fair to hand me over bodily in this way to my enemy for a trifling indiscretion ? They are in the majority too. Intercede for me, pray. Do, madam.” He was not affecting this anxiety, for he realised the transparency of his motive to at least Dick's eyes.

Mrs Bleecker shook her head admonishingly. “ Ah, I fear the culprit deserves to stand the brunt of his heinous transgression. However, *perhaps* Miss Cornéille *will be lenient*.” The peculiar emphasis given conveyed unmistakably to Clarisse, Mrs Bleecker's wish that she should desist.

“ You seem reasonably penitent, Mr Rodgers, and I am disposed to be lenient and spare you remorse, sleepless nights, nameless retribution. I'll do unto you as I hope you will do unto me under similar circumstances.” All this she delivered with a grand flourish. In her gesticulations she caught in the lace garniture of her toilet a little horseshoe pendant from her bracelet, and in detaching it accidentally unlinked it from the bracelet. “ And,

as the princesses do in the *Arabian Nights*, I'll give you *this*," she held up the trinket, "as a token of forgiveness," and handed it to him.

Dick looked as though he would like to collar him. Bacon and Kingston exclaimed :

"Forgive us, too, that we also may receive a token, and show our gratitude !"

"No, gentlemen, impossible. There is a difference between a premeditated sin and a spontaneous one." There was an arch girlishness about her that seemed to bewitch these men as she sprinkled them with this grain of Attic salt, feigning the air of a philosopher. Yet, withal, she was such a veritable *enfant gâté*, it was preposterous in the extreme.

Dick kept thinking what an impulsive child of nature she was to give Rodgers, of all men, a token. Bosh ! What did it matter to him ? The girl was nothing to him. He felt like cuffing himself for being such an idiot. Thoughts are errant torments, not to be silenced, even by a man of sense.

Try as he might, after they left the Bleeckers as a party, all the way to the hotel Dick kept falling into a morose mood. His companions twitted him without mercy. He protested, and gave as an excuse :

"I've been fighting a racking headache all day, but it has worsted me. Won't you come to my den and have a glass of wine and a smoke before going home ?"

With one accord they assented. Soon Dick recovered his affable manner. Certainly they

presented, at this moment, the outward appearance of a most congenial set of chums, and they were so diametrically different in cardinal attributes, it was strange, all things considered, that they never had embroiled one another. Unanimous love of art and music had always proved a strong bond of union, despite other differences.

Finally, after a brief time had elapsed, when the enjoyment of the evening had been freely discussed, Jasper Rodgers, who had quaffed several glasses of brandy, in a constrained fashion switched aside from the topic they then chatted about.

"I thought Miss Cornéille was too *bien élevée* to make the stupid, rude blunder she was guilty of to-night. I lay it all to want of tact, rather than lack of good breeding, for no one can convince me, after my observation this evening, that that *young innocent* is not at heart a consummate flirt, and knows something of the world."

"Jasper!" Dick exclaimed in astonishment.

"That's all right, Dick. I happen to know more about the pedigree and history of the fair demoiselle than either of you, and, well—blood will tell!"

The innuendo implied in his words and tone, caused his companions to stop smoking, and look at him with indignation.

Dick rose, and with frigidity said: "In my presence I cannot suffer such remarks to be made about a lady of my acquaintance by any person."

"Egad, Dick! you're laying yourself open to the charge of being her champion. Confess to us, *are*

you the favoured one?" Evidently the wine had gone to this young man's head.

"*Jasper Rodgers, if you utter another word, by heavens! I'll pitch you out of the window!*"

Dick was livid through rage, his eyes were snapping menacingly. His two other friends, knowing him to be a victim of heart disease, felt the dread that this excitement was exposing him to serious danger, stepped promptly between the two men.

Henry Bacon took Jasper by the arm, insisting calmly that he must apologise. At the same time, Edward Kingston was striving to mollify Dick.

Dick's ire had imparted to him the appearance of height and strength, whereas, the maudlin state Jasper was gradually lapsing into, made him look insignificant, weak-kneed, and cowardly. He unsteadily stood facing Dick, stammering in a thick voice:

"Dick, old man, I say, I didn't mean it. She's a deuced nice girl. . . ."

"Silence!" yelled Dick, with clenched fists, "or, by God! I'll kill you!"

"Dick, old man, forgive me. I apologise," he persisted.

"Get out of my room! Let this end our acquaintance. Drunk or sober, there are some things which no man should forget. One word — *remember, Jasper Rodgers, dare you speak disrespectfully or insinuatingly about that lady, and you have me to answer.* Now, go along. I can't breathe the same air with such a despicable hound!" He threw the

door wide open, and was in no humour to be opposed.

The trio withdrew, the two who were clear-headed apprehending some violence on the part of Dick, who was enraged beyond all reason, to accompany Jasper, who was becoming less and less responsible, and less able to take care of himself.

Once Bacon had decided to take charge of Jasper, and had driven away with him, Kingston resolved to return to Dick. He was actuated by the fear that Dick through his fury might have suddenly succumbed to his well-known malady. If so, he would sadly require some friendly hand to minister to him.

The door stood ajar. Without knocking, Kingston entered, and found Dick prone upon a lounge, eyes wide-open, lips moving as he muttered under his breath, his fists clenching and unclenching.

"Oh!" he exclaimed the instant he perceived Kingston, "Ned, I am grateful to you for returning. I believe I should have died if I had no one to give me solace. Ned, I certainly should have killed *that dastard* if we had been alone!"

"Drop that subject instantly, Dick," interrupted Kingston, "I came back to assuage, not to aggravate your disquietude." Some one rapped vehemently. Kingston went to the door, and found the night-watchman. He peered into the room, through the opening, thrusting in at arm's length a tray holding a pot of tea, cups, cream, and sugar.

"Mister Drysdale, sur, always takes tay when he's ill."

"Thank you, Michael. By the way, I'll remain here to-night, so keep a sharp look-out, my man, I may ring later."

Meantime, from sheer exhaustion, Dick had dozed, and was breathing in a laboured manner. Kingston, who was perfectly familiar with Dick's quarters, proceeded to hunt up a pair of slippers and a smoking jacket. Then he took up his night-watch like a well-trained nurse. Every now and again, softly standing over the sleeper, he listened to his respirations with studied attention.

There was not one sign to indicate restfulness in this sleep, and the irregular respiration alarmed Kingston as time wore on. Finally, after waiting to no purpose for an hour for some evidence of betterment in his friend's condition, he rang. With precaution, he gently opened the door, stepping without to intercept Michael. He asked if there was a doctor in the hotel.

"No — oh, yes, sur, a Dr Covert, registered very late; bin to a medical convention, and didn't care to drive home so late."

"Very well. Go to his room, and ask him to be good enough to come up here and look at a young gentleman suddenly taken ill. Tell him Mr Drysdale's name as well as mine. Stop a minute." He stepped back into the room, took a hasty glance at Dick, got a card, and wrote:

"Edward Kingston's compliments. He desires Dr Covert to have the kindness to come at once to No. 7. Mr Drysdale is very ill."

"There, Michael, give this to the doctor, and say to him not to take time to dress, but come at once."

Only a few minutes elapsed before the footfalls of two persons coming upstairs could be heard. Kingston walked out to meet the doctor.

"Dr Covert, I believe? I am Mr Kingston, Mr Drysdale's friend. You are most kind to come so promptly, doctor."

"No, not at all, Mr Kingston. Strange coincidence, I am well acquainted with Drysdale. What's the matter?" queried the doctor.

Kingston explained in a cursory way about the unpleasant scene which he supposed the cause of Dick's exhaustion, and why he felt undue alarm. The doctor said it would be extremely unwise to arouse the sufferer, but that he ought to have a look at him, which he cautiously did.

"Has he been dissipating much?"

"No; he is a very moderate fellow in all that sort of thing, so far as I know, and we've been chums six years."

"I see, I see, what's the matter here. You said he had an access of anger, eh?"

Kingston nodded his head.

"Was he struck?"

"No, doctor."

"Did he fall?"

"That I do not know, for I went below stairs, and when I returned he was stretched out where he is now, but conscious. We chatted about two

minutes. I was preparing to give him a cup of tea, and without warning he fell into this stupor before I could pour it out, and there he has lain ever since as you see him,—that was almost two hours ago.”

“My advice is to let him remain until he wakes naturally, *unless* his breathing should become stertorous, then arouse him instantly, and send for me, otherwise don’t let him know that I’ve been here, and in the morning I’ll send him my card as an old friend. Nature has collapsed from cardiac exhaustion, and is now trying to repair the strain by a natural process. Should you need me, send down *at once*. Good-night.”

Once alone, Kingston hunted about for an exciting book to read, to preclude the chance of his falling asleep. Finding Octave Feuillet’s “*La Veuve*,” he disposed the lamp-screens so as to protect Dick’s eyes, settled himself comfortably, and began to peruse this intensely exciting tragedy of love and marriage. He wanted to smoke, but considerately refrained, in order not to vitiate the atmosphere for his friend. He kept one eye on the patient and one on the book. In time his vigilance was rewarded by detecting Dick’s eyelids quiver, and his eyes open, and he stretched his arms over his head.

“Hallo, Ned! what the dickens are you doing here? Where’s my cup of tea?”

“By George! Dick, you are a caution! How you have the colossal nerve to roar for tea when

'tis daybreak, I can't imagine." All the time he was getting the teapot off the brazier, and preparing a cup as quickly as possible.

"Just sit up, lazy-bones, to drink it. I'll keep you company."

Like old cronies these young fellows sat sipping their cups of tea, Dick protesting that he did not now feel, nor forsooth had he been ill.

"Can't a chap take a needful snooze without being booked on the invalid corps as a victim of a malady? Bah! 'tis my quick blood that plays me these tricks. How Jasper outraged me. I feel wild to think about it now. . . ."

"Look here, Dick, I'll gag you if you can't curb yourself. I want you to distinctly understand that that topic is tabooed for the present. Besides, you should show some compassion for me by promptly turning in, and letting me have a chance to do likewise, and get forty winks."

Kingston took one of Dick's rooms, and they were both soon in bed and asleep. The sunlight streamed in, and wakened Kingston at an early hour. He found Dick sleeping all right, and stole away to his own quarters.

At nine o'clock Dick was aroused from his heavy slumber by a messenger from his uncle, who requested him to breakfast with him. Amongst his morning letters was one from Clarisse, asking him to call on her the following day at three o'clock.

He sent word to his uncle, that as he was rather

seedy, he would prefer to go the next morning to breakfast, if convenient. Soon back came an answer to consider himself engaged without fail the next morning, but to just look in during the evening.

To Clarisse's note he replied, assuring her that it would afford him the greatest pleasure to call as requested. When he had indited this brief note to her he experienced a qualm of regret to consider that he had no right to shelter her from such a malicious wretch as Jasper; he thought vaguely, perhaps it might some day be otherwise, so, at least, he hoped.

Kingston had left a little note, urging Dick on no account to see Jasper alone, as they both had inordinate tempers, and no possible good could come out of it, winding up with :

"To-morrow evening, don't forget, we are to meet, as per engagement, at the Club."

The welcome Herbert Severance gave Dick that evening was salutary to him in his recent disorganised state of mind. He thought, so at least he said to his nephew, that he looked remarkably well, "rugged and stalwart as a man of steel."

Hour closed in upon hour, as they recounted incidents connected with their peregrinations. Dick said very little about the ladies. He was always disposed to be reticent respecting his society acts.

"Dick, I have a big surprise in store for you during the week," Herbert Severance announced at the finish of the evening, "but wild horses couldn't drag it from me till the appointed time."

"Are you going to marry, uncle?" asked Dick, in surprise.

"Marry! Bless your soul, decidedly not! I think it much more likely you will shortly invite me to your wedding, or, like an obedient youth, ask my consent, eh, Dick?"

"Possibly, but for the moment, uncle, I do not think my moon has dipped in the honey. I'll come in good season for breakfast. Is the hour nine thirty, as formerly?" And they parted like two boys—a pat on the back, an under-hand squeeze, never once suspecting that the next morning would provoke the bad blood it did, when Herbert Severance waxed so wroth concerning Dick's interest in "*A nobody-knows-who's daughter*."

CHAPTER XI.

MRS BLEECKER'S COUP D'ÉTAT.

“Strange that a creature, rational and cast in human mould, should brutalize by choice his nature.”

EARLY the next morning, Bacon and Kingston betook themselves to Jasper's rooms, agreeing between themselves to use all their personal influence to induce him to send back the trinket to Miss Cornéille, and redress his wrong-doing by writing a note of apology to Dick.

They found him in a sullen, dogged humour, the worse for drink, and not amenable to their arguments. He intimated that he was perfectly willing to await further developments to justify himself in his present inimical attitude.

“Without a doubt, before many weeks the immaculate lily will reveal carnivorous fangs; for I tell you, boys, blood will tell. More than all that, I think Drysdale will alter his tone when he learns *that she is the illegitimate daughter of Herbert Severance.*”

“What!” they both ejaculated.

“Only this. No one in New York, among the high-tone set the old man affects—none of the old-

timers know of his marriage, and Clarisse Cornéille is his . . . ”

“There, there, what rubbish! Don't make yourself the laughing stock of society by circulating such a malevolent story,” spoke up Kingston, with disgust and impatience.

“Very well; but, my dear Ned, you'll have to dismount your high horse presently. I've made it my business to ask every person who would be likely to know, and they disclaim all knowledge of his marriage. It was a continental affair. The sly old dog! held up to giddy youths as a pattern of excellence and honour; a churchman in good repute and standing; not sanctimonious, you know, but exemplary,—just virtuous enough,—a practical everyday Christian; and all the rest of such nonsensical cant! Egad! I shall enjoy an *exposé* of his hypocrisy and two-facedness.” He paused in his tirade to take a glass of absinthe.

“In the name of common decency, don't rattle on in this way. How do you know aught to base your suspicion upon?” asked Bacon.

“Know!” shouted Jasper, derisively, as he rocked to and fro unsteadily upon his feet, “know! how do I know? Ask me a hard question. I'll tell you, by the girl's own confession in London!”

“What! you don't mean it?” they excitedly exclaimed, glancing first at him to see if he had gone mad, as he stood defiant in his insolence, exulting over their confusion, then at each other.

"Yes, gentlemen—as—your—understanding—seem—to—be—a—little—fuddled, I repeat, by—her—own—confession,—in London,—concerning—Count—De La Rue," responded Jasper with studied exasperating distinctness, enunciating every word so slowly, one glided into the following. He was beginning to show the effects of the liquor.

"Jasper, you're rendering yourself amenable to harsh criticism by your unwarrantable course." Kingston spoke with ill-concealed contempt. Rising to his feet, "I think you will have cause to bitterly regret your behaviour when you discover, as you surely will, your former friends shunning you, and marking you as a man not to be trusted. . . ."

"Pooh ! pooh !" interjected Jasper, pouring out another glass of absinthe, which he gulped down, slobbering it over his chin and soiling his linen as he leant on his elbows, which were posed upon the mantel-shelf, oscillating from side to side, with an occasional sway forward as his knees bent under his weight.

"Yes," continued Kingston, "I reiterate, your former friends will mark you as a man to shun, as a man not to be trusted, as a man yielding to debasing impulses, as a man to keep at bay when one has sisters !"

"Pooh ! pooh ! Can't you sugar the devil a bit for an old friend ? No ? Then I'll take another drink. Here's to my promised damnation !" Down he gulped another, and yet another glass of

the intoxicating beverage. He made a sorry but ridiculous aspect as he tried to walk back and forth the length of the room. Staggering from side to side, lurching forward with such precipitation and indirection as to almost lose his balance, he was indeed a limp object of pity. Lack of co-ordination in this instance was undeniable drunkenness.

Hoping against hope, Kingston in a more suasive tone depicted what was imminent.

"It will surely befall you, Jasper, therefore as a disinterested friend I entreat you for your own sake, for the maintenance of your self-respect and dignity, to do the straight, manly thing, and obviate the chagrin you will otherwise experience."

At this juncture Jasper blurted out between hiccoughs :

"Humph ! not I. Take me for a turncoat ? I'll be d——d if I do !" Seeing that Kingston had concluded in disgust and was about to depart, he moved towards him as best he could, showing his teeth, and looking like a jackal, sneered, "See here, Kingston, I'll wager that the girl voluntarily compromises herself with me in less than a week if you let matters take their own course. Meantime, she will completely hoodwink you and Drysdale and all the world till the proofs are beyond denial, and obvious to the blindest. What do you say ?" Down went another glass of absinthe.

With insufferable contempt Kingston glanced at Bacon. They tacitly concluded to leave, convinced that Jasper was incorrigible, and inclining to vitu-

peration. All opposition or further argument would now only incite him to design some new order of devilment to entangle the unwary girl.

Both men felt their blood tingle with the irresistible desire to cowhide this villain who had suddenly revealed the propensities of a mean, depraved nature, but checked themselves only because he was maddened through drink, hence not responsible. No sooner had they reached the door than Jasper threw down with a slap upon the table a note, saying, with hateful irony in his thick voice :

“In evidence, read that ! The lady,—sweet little Philomela,—even now smiles upon me. You see, boys, I have her for a correspondent.” He waved triumphantly the little note, fluttering like a dove in the clutch of a vulture. “But read it, if you want to see how a leopard changes its spots. Look ! the signature is a dainty little pointed Italian handwriting—perfumed paper,”—he smelt it,—“all in good form, eh ?” Again he flaunted the note under their very eyes. Neither of the exasperated men deigned to look at it. This last act incensed them to an intense pitch ; now they could scarcely restrain themselves from assaulting him.

Instantly Bacon clutched the note, snatching it out of Jasper’s hands, tore it into a hundred fragments, flung it out of the window, to go swirling on the wind into space—into eternity, then he turned furiously upon the miscreant.

“There ! sir. Anyone who so far forgets him-

self to boast of his conquests, deserves far rougher treatment, be he drunk or sober, from the hands of any man, disinterested or otherwise, with the instincts of a gentleman! Don't flatter yourself, *we are sparing you*. We have an unmitigated contempt for you, and leave you with a whole skin, for we consider you an ignominious wretch, unworthy either to associate with or measure swords with." Bacon had risen to the occasion with so much vehemence and spirit, Jasper was actually speechless. He vaguely heard Kingston say as they closed the door after them:—

"By Jove! Harry, that was a settler, and I endorse every word."

Once outside, they cudgeled their brains to determine what course to pursue. Finally a happy thought struck Bacon.

"Let us go to the clever diplomat, Mrs Bleecker, tell her the cardinal points of this shameful affair, and follow her advice." Kingston acquiesced.

Walking along in silence to carry out their last resolve, they both involuntarily thought how shockingly imprudent of Miss Cornéille, certainly she was sadly in need of a guardian. What could have tempted her to write to Jasper. Bacon mentally patted himself on his back for his *coup* in destroying the "*evidence*." No one was likely to accredit aught Jasper might now say on that score. His demeanour would put him in universal disfavour, he would doubtless be hooted out of respectable society. Right enough. A man with such degenerate

proclivities surely forfeited foothold in every respectable rank of life. Nothing should or could excuse him for his intolerable brutality, for his maliciousness, although he was drunk.

How singular that never until the present episode had Jasper Rodgers betrayed himself in this despicable light, to the men he had fraternised with for so many years under so many diverse circumstances. Was it a case of *in vino veritas*? Thrown off guard through his inebriation, had he unwittingly revealed that dual nature which a sane man keeps hidden and subdued?

In fairness to him, let it be recorded that he had ever been esteemed highly by his acquaintances and *convives* for his many admirable traits of character, and he had been esteemed for the man they found him to be. He had his idiosyncrasies, but, then, who has not? Such are accounted in the reckoning of human character merely as individualities. He had never before been known to disparage any person, certainly never a woman.

Thinking in this wise, Kingston suddenly said, as though arriving at a solution: "Harry, it's a case of moral rabies!"

"Yes, Ned, I agree with you; but Pasteur can't cure him, and he'll never be properly cauterised this side of Hades," added Harry.

Mrs Bleecker was soon apprised by Bacon and Kingston of the insulting, outrageous attitude which Rodgers had assumed towards her guest,

Miss Cornéille. Without desiring to extenuate his acts, they informed her that he was under the influence of his cups, and that they could not prevail upon him to redress his shameless behaviour. He had gone so far as to boast of receiving a note from Miss Cornéille, which he had displayed, but which they had destroyed without scruples, believing, as they did, that in his perverse, audacious frame of vindictiveness, he was quite capable of making any assertion, or of distorting the smallest, most insignificant thing to fortify himself in his unwarrantable course.

“So you destroyed the letter? Good, good!” approvingly said Mrs Bleecker. “Nothing could have been better or wiser.” She paused, and donning her thinking cap, appeared cautiously to search her brain for ways and means to remedy the mischief, and quietly obviate a scandal without creating a useless hubbub. Presently she arrived at a conclusion.

“My good friends, there are sometimes conflicting circumstances which it is best, right or wrong, to consign to an unbreakable silence, and dismiss without talk or commotion. I fear we are dealing with just this sort of a case, mainly because the conflict is unequal, falling as it does between a man of the world, who is a reckless brute when in liquor, and a young unsophisticated girl.” She paused an instant, then with decision, “I will call upon Mr Rodgers, and see what I can achieve.”

Both men evinced astonishment, and were on the verge of protesting.

"You may rest content, my friends," she said, witnessing their dismay, "that I shall be the very pink of discretion, and a model of diplomacy. I must aver I should not like to transmit this matter to Miss Cornéille's guardian, as it has occurred under my roof."

She cut short the interview there and then, enquired for Mr Rodgers' address, excused herself for all informality, as she meant to give her instant attention to the affair before Mr Rodgers might sally forth from his studio.

With unreserved expressions of gratitude, they thanked her for her prompt and magnanimous enlistment in the affair. They departed much easier in their minds, feeling whatever she did would be well and sagaciously done.

Within half-an-hour she was driven up to Jasper Rodgers' domicile, and gained prompt admission after her card had been presented. Scarcely had she crossed the threshold of the front door, when Jasper, unsteady of gait, but most ridiculously obsequious in his demonstration of politeness, traversed the hall to meet her. All the while he advanced, he scrutinised her in a suspicious fashion. Bracing up, he saluted her with supercilious politeness, and led her to his studio.

"What an unexpected honour to receive a call from you, Mrs Bleecker ! To what am I so deeply indebted ? Is Mrs Bleecker well ?" He seemed suddenly sobered.

"Oh, yes, indeed, perfectly well, Mr Rodgers. I fear you will wish I had not favoured you with a call when I explain my errand, eh?" Jasper glanced at her, disconcerted, but cautiously sought to veil his surprise, and handed her to a chair.

"Mrs Bleecker, permit me to assure you, errand or no errand, you are most welcome."

"The little lady perched her head coyly on one side, looking blandly up into his face.

"Wait a bit, Mr Rodgers; I am an eleemosynary deputy, begging funds for a certain hospital of which you have already heard." He was completely thrown off the scent. She began to draw from out of her hand-satchel a book containing a long list of donors, and significantly held it towards him. "Now you wish me in Halifax, or find your purse-strings in a Gordian knot?" plied the almost sinner, with incomparable artful artlessness.

"My dear Mrs Bleecker, pray do not attribute to me miserly traits until I have a chance of refusing. Let me know exactly what you expect me to do?" Thus speaking, he had, in a listless, maudlin manner, stroked her mantle from the shoulder to the wrist, with a certain air of familiarity native to him in the presence of women.

Mrs Bleecker was inwardly cringing, boiling over with indignation at this insufferable liberty; but her mission was uppermost in her thoughts, she must not be over finical. She drew away a trifle by leaning back in her chair, and with a merry little laugh replied to him.

“ Well ! Mr Rodgers, you are certainly a perfectly lovely venturer to put to me such a dangerous question. I am noted the town over as being an avaricious cormorant wherein my pet charities are concerned. My motto is *audace, audace, toujours l'audace*. . . . May I tax your generosity for the same sum as—” she began to finger over the leaves of her memorandum book, scanning up and down the long list of names and the amounts opposite each name.

“ Never mind,” he brusquely said, “ what Tom, Dick, or Harry gave. I'll give twenty dollars cash, and”—he surveyed the well-covered walls of his studio—“ the two panel pictures either side of that window, if you want them.”

“ Mr Rodgers ! you are an angel of goodness to be so liberal. Will you have the kindness to call the coachman to carry my bocty to my carriage ?” She could not avoid this innate avariciousness and bird-in-the-hand principle when bent on charity. “ You can either give me the money, or send a cheque to the secretary.”

“ Bother the secretary ! My transaction is with you.” He pulled out his wallet and handed her twenty dollars, moved at once towards the wall, unhung the pictures, and carried them himself to her carriage.

Meantime Mrs Bleecker kept saying to herself, “ How shall I do it ? How shall I do it ?” evidently perplexed. When Jasper returned, she indulged in exaggerated terms of admiration and gratefulness

for his sympathetic responsiveness. She quite captivated Jasper. Her words of praise were accentuated by the remembrance of his recent interview with his two men friends.

He seated himself close beside her, and again stroked her mantle, and leered into her face.

"My dear Mrs Bleecker, I am sure that there is nothing in my power that I would not do gladly to promote your unselfish philanthropic schemes." All the time he hung over her with suggestive impudence, smirked and eyed her.

"Ah, Mr Rodgers!" she sighed, to cover up her internal revolt, "there was a reservation in that gallant offer that quite vexes me!" She thought now to tack for shore. "Why did you qualify? Why not say for me, not for my schemes? Alas, alas! this all comes from growing old." Jasper no longer stroked her mantle, but grasped her arm, and quietly slipped his other hand from the top of the chair-back till it rested upon her shoulder. She continued, although bubbling through suppressed indignation, "I have always advanced the doctrine that after forty a woman should be killed, for the world was no longer her place. Although life is dear to me, I adhere to the doctrine!" She turned as if uncomfortable, and looked at his hand.

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Jasper, taking the little lady's hand. "Mrs Bleecker, I, for one, avow on solemn oath, that all women are silly, simpering, capricious bundles of affectation until they are forty or past, and not worth the quest of

any man of either taste or sense." He became instinctively conscious of his soiled linen and unneat attire, suffered a moment's embarrassment whilst he stuffed his pocket-handkerchief under his waistcoat across his shirt-front, all the time talking. "I'll reiterate, my dear lady, there's nothing in my power I'll not do to gain *your favour* or *your* approval, or to promote *your* happiness!" Again he stroked her mantle; she fairly suffocated through rage, but actuated by politic tolerance, she smiled complacently at him as he continued, "Put me on my mettle, and test this most solemn pledge!" He had veritably felt an undue encouragement in the exhilarating little lady's praise and smiles, and found her most charming. She vigorously shook the forefinger of the hand she was eager to disengage from his obnoxious caresses, uttering with feigned, but none the less effective incredulity:

"Tut, tut, young man, your words are the merest bubbles which would break and dissolve into nothingness the moment light is thrown upon them."

"Well, I asseverate, my dear Mrs Bleecker, it is true; try me," hotly urged Jasper, evincing injured pride.

"Now, my dear friend, I know as well as I do my A B C's, that if you or any young man be smitten with or even interested in a young girl, neither you nor he would exchange the most trifling memento she might have bestowed upon either of you, to win my or any other old lady's greatest

approbation. Don't contradict me, pray don't, Mr Rodgers, for I'm stubborn in my opinion, and I can prove it also," insinuated Mrs Bleecker. He had essayed two or three times to interrupt her, but she had held her ground till the finish, when he again protested.

"Try me, Mrs Bleecker, try me, and then judge."

This was her opportune time to drive home the entering wedge.

"Well, I will. Let me see, let me see. What shall it be? . . . You observe, Mr Rodgers, that you cover me with confusion, for I know so few of your lady friends, I can hardly test your avowal, not even in a paltry manner." Then, as if suddenly recollecting: "Oh! I had forgotten, I'll have the little horse-shoe that Miss Cornéille gave you!" and she laughed to feign her delight in possibly cornering him, but in truth to cover her doubt.

Jasper fumbled in his waistcoat pockets, drew out the little trinket, and tossed it disdainfully into Mrs Bleecker's lap.

"Pooh! *that* is so valueless, your test has not cost me the shadow of a sacrifice." Then with sarcasm in his tone: "Long since the namby-pamby giver escaped my thoughts. Ask me, rather, for my allowance of cigars for one week, if you aim to hit my heart; but that thing has no value."

"I am sorry I didn't make a request that might have cost you a sacrifice." She lost no time in

placing the, *to her precious*, horse-shoe safely into her satchel. "However, the willingness with which you acceded, makes me free to aver that I am half-convinced that you are prepared to comply with the necessary abnegation my most severe test of friendship might call for. I am sincerely gratified." She began to rustle her dress, and prepare for departure. "How the time flies, and I have only scored two victims on the altar of charity to-day. Mr Rodgers, will you be startled if I promise to pay you another visit later on, if I have a deficit to make up for my hospital fund?"

"Certainly not. You know we poor beggars of painters have not a plethora of filthy lucre as a rule, but we're to a man a soft-hearted and open-handed lot of chaps, ready to do to the top of our bent."

"I believe you, and I shall come with less fear and trembling when I play mendicant again. Thanks, a thousand times. Good afternoon, Mr Rodgers."

With a light heart and a feeling of triumph, the artful little diplomat tripped to her carriage, conscious that she had most adroitly managed the difficult recreant, without having provoked a single iota of ill-nature, nor in any manner had she revealed the true purport of her philanthropic exploit.

This was her way of going around an obstacle of social bramble-bushes without getting a scratch or tear, or without giving a single cut or slash. She

took herself a whit to task for having used her pet charity as a scapegoat. "But, after all," she argued to herself, "the hospital was ever in need of funds." She had not concocted a mere figment, and then, *it was her bounden duty* to collect funds whenever the venture promised to be successful. So this shadow of a black mark was readily dissipated, and her conscience sponged fair and clean by the justification with which she found the exigency fraught.

She sent at once a duplicate telegram to Bacon and Kingston.

"Mission successful beyond expectation. Call for details. Answer when. R. BLEECKER."

CHAPTER XII.

DICK ATTACKED.

“Who committed
To such a viper his most sacred trust
Of secrecy.”

RICHARD DRYSDALE felt sore and distraught after the turbulent and unexpected scene which occurred during and after the breakfast at his uncle's house. His temper had been severely taxed by Herbert Severance's hostile attitude, and cruel flings at singers, and avowed effort to spare him from ruin. He likewise felt perplexed by the involved mystery of it all; however, he must wait further developments. Now he must hasten directly to Mrs Bleecker's to meet his engagement made by note with Clarisse. Yes, “the nobody-knows-who's daughter” his uncle had railed against, although an hour late he hoped, as he had told his uncle, to placate the lady.

Clarisse received him most cordially, apologising for having taken the liberty of sending for him. He assured her there was no reason whatever for considering herself under obligations to him for an act, which afforded him great pleasure to comply with.

She was in a peculiar state of excitement, and branched out in an incoherent manner.

"Mrs Bleecker is not at home, Mr Drysdale, and if you will not deem me very indiscreet I should like to have you consider this interview as confidential."

"That shall be as you desire, Miss Cornéille. But, as a sincere friend, truly concerned in your welfare, allow me to suggest, according to my judgment, you should take Miss Longstreth into our confidence," said Dick, regarding Clarisse with a degree of confusion and agitation.

"Mr Drysdale," disregarding his request, she began, "I may as well tell you at once, Edith thinks that Mr Rodgers was very rude and ungentlemanly in his deportment towards me the other evening. She also deems my foolishness in giving him the horse-shoe trinket very short-sighted, and likely to be taken as an encouragement by him. I am in such distress, so mortified, through my unseemingly conduct. I sent for you to advise me what I must do to redeem myself." She could not conceal her present emotion, yet felt she must explain. "Mr Drysdale, I have been so drawn to you since the first moment I met you, I feel *je ne sais quoi*, that you can understand me, and will do your utmost to advise me." Her ingenuousness had become pathetic.

Dick could not answer. For once his judgment failed him. He tossed about on an incoming sea of passionate love for this trustful girl, who had

so won him in her complete faith in him, at a time when she called into question the manliness of another, at a time when he knew she was in imminent peril of a blackguard. Involuntarily, he reached out towards her, grasped her hand, and pressed it gently, all the while looking earnestly into her eyes.

There was an eloquence in their mutual dumb confession that both felt thrilling their innermost beings, surpassing the power of mortal language. The moment was more than trying, indeed charged with a certain danger to the man who had resolved so often, and with veritable solemnity to himself, that he should avoid giving expression to his sentiments to Clarisse, until he was known to her guardian. Now, he felt it absolutely necessary to insist upon Miss Longstreth's presence. It was his only safeguard.

Clarisse was trembling under the sweep of destiny. Unfortunately Dick's silence was misconstrued by her. She concluded that he was deprecating her, whereas, he was lost in the concentration of his thoughts as he strove to divine a safe way for her out of an untoward dilemma.

"Then you, too, condemn me?" the poor deluded girl tremulously asked after a painful pause.

"No, most assuredly not. My hesitation is due alone to my studied caution, as to the wisest and most satisfactory course to pursue in your behalf, Miss Cornéille." He spoke honestly from the depths of his soul, but not for the reason she

feared. "Pardon me, but have you any objection to Miss Longstreth's presence during our conversation?"

"Oh, no; I only wish you could persuade her to come. A moment before your arrival she refused me *point blank*, offering as her reason that it might appear to you, under the circumstances, that you were doubted, and subjected to a system of espionage. You know, Mr Drysdale, you have expressed yourself very strongly relative to American and European etiquette."

"Do not misjudge me, Miss Cornéille. My principal reason in desiring Miss Longstreth to be a party to our conversation, is because, she is possessed of remarkably clear powers of discernment, and, as a woman, may have intuitive wisdom that would elude a man's reasoning. Moreover, she has had considerable experience. She is your friend, your companion. Miss Cornéille, in fine, she must come; I assure you, it is wise. There are reasons I may not explain, but it is best."

The arguments advanced by Dick impressed Clârisse. She excused herself, and left the room to fetch Edith.

During her temporary absence, Dick felt as if a cold steel had entered his heart's core. He suffered keenly, because he had no recognised right to protect this young guileless girl, who might so easily become the prey of almost any social man-marauder who might chance to gain

her confidence. He mentally cursed the social slavery holding him in abeyance.

A frou-frou signalised the approach of the young ladies. Dick advanced to meet them as they entered arm-in-arm.

"Miss Longstreth, permit me to thank you for your compliance to my express wish. Now, let us three try to sift this unpleasantness to the bottom without unnecessary detail. Have you any cogent personal, or other reason for denouncing and mistrusting Mr Rodgers?"

"Such a personal question strikes me as a trifle indiscreet, Mr Drysdale. Nevertheless, I will confess that the man's *personnel* is most repugnant to me, and his behaviour scarcely can be deemed becoming a refined gentleman. Let this all go for what it's worth. I am convinced, after careful deliberation, that Clarisse has but one proper course to pursue, namely, send for her guardian, and commit the matter to him. I comprehend it is excessively trying for her to begin her acquaintance with her guardian by asking him the first thing to adjust a social difficulty. The false education of women, together with the bias of the social fabric, makes it the only admissible way out of similar snarls with propriety, unless the woman has the right to call upon another. So-called disinterested men friends, befriending a woman, are apt to compromise her, despite the absolute purity of their intentions."

At her last remark Dick curiously eyed her. The

thought flashed through his mind, perhaps she intended to probe his feelings ; was she measuring his sincerity by trying to provoke him to some avowal ?

“ I quite agree with you, Miss Longstreth, and yet we must have proper consideration for Miss Cornéille, who does not likely know what view her guardian may take of her grievance, and may expose herself to needless censure. Besides, I'm inclined to believe that we are exaggerating the matter. Personal dignity is most laudable, but sometimes the magnifying power of *too* much attention to a trifle to maintain its integrity, does no end of mischief by giving an uncalled-for notoriety any fastidious lady would naturally shrink from, had she conjectured it possible before resenting even a serious affront. So at least I think.” Perceiving that Edith impatiently patted the floor with her foot, and that her lips gradually curled with scorn as he spoke, “ Pray, do not allow me to antagonise you, Miss Longstreth, for your judgment is needed by your friend. I do not shirk taking immediate action personally. I will cowhide the fellow, but you with your sound sense of the world have already affirmed that I am prohibited from coming to the fore in so delicate an affair.”

Edith smiled, just with a shade of disdain and incredulity in her expression, while Clarisse gazed wistfully at one, then at the other, not quite sure what turn either might take, yet nursing the hope for a decision that should effectually relieve her of responsibility.

As no one spoke, Dick resumed :

"I can but think that Mrs Bleecker, with her ingenious tact, can arrange this affair in a thoroughly judicious and satisfactory method. She could write a note to Mr Rodgers,"—Clarisse winced, turning scarlet,—“embodying her disapproval of the interchange of even trifling mementoes between casual acquaintances, and request him to do her the kindness to return the trinket; or something of similar import. That would straighten out the unpleasantness without commotion, or without too many dabbling in it. Afterwards, Miss Cornéille can completely ignore the culprit.”

Clarisse clapped her hands, glad to have the bugbear overcome without the dreaded mortification of carrying her complaint to her guardian. Edith was not half pleased. Her own moral courage betrayed her too frequently into a defiant, out-and-out demand for her rights, and an insistence that any short-comer should have meted out an unstinted, if deserved, portion of chastisement, let the consequences be what they might.

Finally Dick's plan was acquiesced in, and the two girls were to be left the task of engineering it through to the end, admonished by Dick.

"It is not in the least necessary to mention to Mrs Bleecker my action or suggestion, she may not approve of my intermeddling."

Edith darted a glance of fury at Dick. He never winced. He answered the thought thus implied indirectly to her.

"Miss Longstreth will doubtless recognise the wisdom of my request when she considers it calmly."

"*Doubtless*, if so says Mr Drysdale," she retorted sharply.

"Edith, don't spar with Mr Drysdale," urged Clarisse. She hesitated an instant; Dick was about to leave. "Mr Drysdale, I wrote to Mr Rodgers . . ."

"Good gracious, Miss Cornéille!"

"Clarisse! have you taken leave of your senses?" exclaimed Edith and Dick simultaneously.

"Yes, I wrote to Mr Rodgers this morning, requesting the return of my trinket," she timidly answered.

Dick was more than astounded—saw the complication—the danger—at once.

"Miss Cornéille, lose not one moment in conferring with Mrs Bleecker. I assure you, you are in jeopardy. Do not delay. I must bid you good afternoon."

Dick hastened to leave the premises, resolved to seek his friends Bacon and Kingston at the club. He tried to impress upon them the necessity that Rodgers should be made to see in some way that, if only for his own sake, he must forestall Mrs Bleecker's possible demand, by writing a polite note to her, assuring her that from Miss Cornéille's note, which he must enclose, that he concluded the trinket possessed some intrinsic value to Miss

Cornéille, hence he returned it with his best compliments, knowing she had bestowed it upon him in jest.

"If he don't," Dick said, "he's a churl, and will get himself into *mauvais odeur* with a coterie, that it would cut his insuperable vanity to be out with. If he don't adopt this course, Miss Cornéille's guardian will eventually take the matter in hand."

Both Kingston and Bacon stated that Rodgers was in a state of ugliness not amenable to persuasion, the effect of excessive drinking, combined with the sting he felt respecting his own behaviour, and Dick's open repudiation of him. For some unknown reason, neither of the men intimated aught concerning their session with Rodgers, or their subsequent interview with Mrs Bleecker. They had not at this time received Mrs Bleecker's telegram. They incidentally suggested that Rodgers was liable to come into the club at any moment, as this was their regular evening to dine together, in consonance with a custom of years' standing. Possibly Dick might conciliate him, for the sake of the lady. He resented the idea with contempt.

Bacon urged again, "For the lady, Dick, surely you will try to swallow your anger for her sake."

"It will cost a tremendous struggle to keep from throttling him, but, boys, I'll do my best," consented Dick. "By-the-bye, I have an important engagement at ten or thereabouts, so I hope you can cut the dinner short, and not detain me beyond that hour."

They assured him that he should leave at "the tap of the drum." Exchanging friendly words with various members of the club, time vanished, and the dinner was nigh a conclusion, when Rodgers made his appearance in a sorry plight through drink, but exquisitely dressed.

He bowed directly towards the group of his old chums, snapped his gloves upon the table, ordered the waiter in a peremptory tone to pull back his chair, and lurched into it seemingly as spineless as a jelly fish. His pitiable constrained politeness, his tell-tale inane assumption to appear at ease, his ridiculous *nonchalance*, excited in his comrades and others a feeling of pity in spite of their contempt.

Turning deliberately to Dick, he addressed his first pleasantry :

"Dickie, old man, have you got off your high-horse?"

Dick frowned, clenched his teeth, shoved his chair back from the table, when he was checked by Kingston.

"Careful, Dick," he whispered, "don't make a scene, bear with him, he's drunk."

Rodgers, receiving no response, reiterated in a voice so loud that every person in the immediate vicinity heard, and turned around smiling to see what was in the wind :

"Dickie, old man ! I say, have you got off your high-horse, eh, old man ?"

Bacon tried to divert his attention,

"By-the-bye, Jasper, I made a rare find to-day." He turned his boozy eyes upon the speaker. "I unearthed a lot of flat Japanese fish-skin fans, yellow, red, and green, just the dandiest things for decoration. . . ."

"I don't care a d—— about your fans, Harry ! To-night I'm thinking of wine and women !"

Dick rose from the table without condescending to look at Jasper. He was livid through rage, his pupils dilating and contracting as his eyes stared wide-open. He addressed himself to his two friends :

"Let's retire to a private room for our coffee and smoke," and he pushed out ahead of the party, to hear a low sardonic laugh, and some one whisper :

"Some woman scrape ! By Jove, Drysdale's hot !"

Dick cast a lowering look over his shoulder, seeing which, Kingston hurried to gain Dick's side before the others were within ear-shot.

"Have a care, Dick, have a care. Jasper is not accountable." Dick shook him off with decided resentment. "*Don't, for God's sake, make a scene. Think of the scandal to the lady—think, Dick, think, don't be rash,*" he implored under his breath.

After this group of four entered the private coffee-room, the door was closed with precaution. Jasper, to all appearance suddenly sobered up a bit, went straight up to Dick, and, in an entirely changed manner, addressed him.

"Look here, Drysdale, if that girl was all right I should feel as you do. . . ." Dick glared at him. "I'm the only one of our party who knows anything about her origin. . . ."

"Hold your tongue!" yelled Dick, "or I'll brain you!"

"Let me speak, let me explain matters. I'll leave it to Bacon and Kingston to decide, if it is fair to rate me this way before I've explained."

To this they both gave approval.

"Let him speak, Dick."

"Hear him out, 'tis but fair."

With no concealment of his choler, Dick leant his elbow on the mantel-shelf, smoked furiously, compelling himself by his sense of justice to conform with his friends' arbitration of fairness, albeit, he felt personally outraged and half betrayed.

"When we were all in Normandy," began Jasper, "I met an old French painter, with whom I hob-nobbed considerably, while you three were otherwise engaged. He is a man very distinguished in art."

Dick, in an undertone, contemptuously interpolated.

"He's hedging now, his explanation doesn't need a prologue."

"Very well, Master Richard, have that as you please. His name is *Count De La Rue*!" maliciously retorted Jasper, chuckling to witness the start of astonishment his listeners gave. "He is the same individual, you will remember, who in-

structed *your friend* in the art of singing, eh?" He pointed at Dick, emphasising "*your friend*" with great animus. "The old French reprobate had been the former lover of her mother." Dick bit his lips, his countenance black through his augmenting wrath. "By-the-bye, it may prove of family interest for you, Richard Drysdale, to know that her mother was the celebrated *diva*, *Clarisse Arditte*. She sat as the model for the picture which secured De La Rue his title, for you should know that the lady's beauty made her a favourite at Court. This is history, Dick." Dick was glaring at him, and appeared to be gathering himself up to close with him. Without noticing him, Jasper triumphantly sneered. "The fact is sufficient to substantiate my assertion, if it were needed, that the mother's lover was left in charge of the daughter until she became of age!"

"Jasper Rodgers, if you have invented this story, I swear by all that's holy, I'll make you suffer for it!" fiercely threatened Dick, then suddenly approaching Jasper, "*I believe it is a lie!*"

These words were no sooner uttered than Jasper sprang upon Dick with clenched fists, dealt him a sledge-hammer blow fair in the chest, that sounded with a sickening thud, knocking him insensible to the floor. Bacon and Kingston jumped instantly to the men, horror-stricken, only to see Dick fall heavily to the floor.

"My God! Jasper, what have you done?" cried

Kingston, who with Bacon's assistance lifted Dick's prostrate form upon a lounge.

"He said *I lied*. Let me tell you both here and now, that the father of Clarisse Cornéille is Dick's uncle! I have delicately withheld all these months afflicting him with the fact, only to be accused of *lying*. I won't stand it. I'll proclaim from the housetops the fact. The girl is a born *demi-mondaine*, and quite equal to take her own part. I shall believe she's Dick's mistress if he persists in defending her. And then—well, there's honour amongst rogues, as the old saw goes—then, I'll throw up the gauntlet." Seeing that Dick did not recover consciousness, he wound up brutally, "Nothing mean about me, fellows; I'll stand the damage, send for a doctor at my expense. I'll profit whilst he sleepeth, and call on the young innocent." And out he swaggered.

A physician was called for. One of the members of the club, a well-known medical man, responded with alacrity. He soon restored Dick to consciousness.

"A blow like that," remarked the doctor, "is enough to kill a man instantly. Any fellow who cannot control his brutal temper better than to inflict such a blow, ought to be prohibited from entering a club not composed of bullies and prize-fighters. It's an outrage not to be placidly tolerated. I for one shall instigate immediate steps to have that young brute expelled." The doctor had delivered his sentiments with marked fervour from the first, enlisting his listeners' support.

Dick, now wholly conscious, said, "Not only is he a brute, doctor, but he is a low, vicious defamer of women! Yes, so low he cannot admit that it is the duty of every man to protect every woman's fair name from infamy, without even entertaining an *arrière-pensée*."

All the club fellows knew that there had been a great disturbance, and that in the "fuss" Rodgers had struck Drysdale a serious blow. Scandalous proceedings in their aristocratic club. The opinion was unanimous that the aggressor should forthwith be expelled without ceremony. Drysdale ought to have spirit enough to horsewhip him. All about a lady. Who was she? This was just the point of danger. Comment would have it, with something like a shade of verity, that there could not be so much smoke without fire; and so, and so, and so, like vitriol mixed with water, the hateful insinuations seethed and burned, spreading at a seven-league pace, till all the world knew, a *shapeless, nameless, damning something*, but what?

They were all men, too, finding occupation in gossip that would have put to blush the most confirmed among women of the guild of tattlers and mischief-makers. Some of these men were coarsened by uncouth, unclean stories, pronounced *good* because of their *badness*. Unfortunately, men congregating constantly with men, as a rule cease to reverence the purity of womankind. Even though personally never indulging in or condescending to retail the questionable witticisms and stories

current, the ear that hearkens often to like ribaldry loses its delicacy, and ceases in time being shocked, does not revolt against the implied undercurrent, because, in fact, inured by use to it. Natures cannot be entirely purged from the licentiousness, from the filthiness, which settles like a mould upon men, even if holding, as one amongst many, an entirely neutral attitude. The tendencies are, as the fumes of the pothouse, to stupify the delicate senses. It is a pest. A woman's name tossed about like a shuttle-cock, from bat to bat, without compunction! Let any man have the temerity to protest that he thinks the game abominable, and he must either ostracise himself, or else have his motives as a rule questioned. . . . It is largely through thoughtlessness. Any man, no difference how debased, has moments when he naturally shrinks from putting a blot or exposing one already on the name of any woman. It is truly the sin of obliquity, which becomes gradually chronic, and a monstrous evil. Once the wrong is done, it can never, *never* be condoned.

Evidently Dick had sustained a cruel shock, and was suffering physical torture. He felt oppressed by the throng of men crowding about him, as well as a great distaste for the conspicuousness of his position. The need of the reviving influence of fresh air increased painfully. He affirmed that he must get up and out at once.

Recalling his engagement with his uncle, he felt annoyed to find the time very much advanced.

Kingston and Bacon proffered their escort to his hotel. After they had attained the street, Dick refused this kindness.

"Thank you, but I'm not going to the hotel; I've an engagement at my uncle's. I feel quite recovered, and will spare you both further trouble. In fact, although I don't wish to appear brusque or ungrateful, I want to collect my thoughts during a solitary walk, for I have important business to transact which commands my closest attention. Hearty thanks for your loyalty to me, Harry and Ned. I appreciate it."

So they diverged on their diverse roads. Dick reviewed his uncle's morning conversation. Strange that he should, without knowing the circumstances, have denounced Clarisse as "an itinerant mummer's daughter," and have spoken so contemptuously of her, as if a mere adventuress, scheming to have some one invest in her and back up her designs. So contrary to the facts. Very strange. Now it just occurred to him that he had failed to set his uncle right on this score, for in his resentment he had absolutely passed by that point. He had not even mentioned her name. As he now reviewed it, his whole bearing seemed very maladroit to him, so far as his uncle was concerned. However, he should make short work of his morning blunder. Then he realised he had no right to presume that Clarisse would accept him as a suitor. Then came a whirlwind of thoughts. Could Jasper really have been poisoned by rumours voiced by De

La Rue? That name, Clarisse Arditte! How his brain swam! His heart was struggling violently to burst its bonds; for a moment he reeled; clutching the fence railing, he managed to keep his footing and regain his equilibrium. He had almost reached his uncle's house; just a moment longer, and all would be well; he could rest there.

"Courage, Dick! courage, Dick!" he involuntarily murmured as he realised his uncertain condition, for the five or ten rods' distance yet to walk seemed to extend indefinitely into limitless space.

Just then a neighbour descended from a carriage, proceeded to unlatch his door, but, attracted by Dick's murmur, paused, looking about to discover the source. He perceived that something was amiss with the man who leant against the railing, and stepped down from his doorstep to render aid.

"Hello, Drysdale! are you ill?"

"Oh, no, thank you. I'm a trifle dizzy. I'll be all serene when once I reach my uncle's."

"Take my arm. I'll see you safe there. Rather unpleasant to be buffeting about alone if one's not well at this hour of the night. Fine bracing weather this. Quite autumnal," chatted the neighbour, and Dick at heart was thankful to feel the prop afforded by his arm and presence. As they stepped to his uncle's door, he withdrew his arm from the neighbour's.

"I shouldn't like to alarm my uncle, so will you have the kindness to leave me now? I'm perfectly safe. Many thanks."

Whilst waiting for the door to open, Dick's thoughts flew like lightning—Jasper, De La Rue, the picture, the title, the girl's mother, the girl's self. My God! What a pressure on his brain! What a leaden load on his heart! Would the door never be opened? He could not maintain his standing position much longer.

Once within, the reaction came. Nature only asserted her rights to a penalty, because she had been harshly violated.

CHAPTER XIII.

CLARISSE'S DAY DREAMS.

“Yes, Love is ever busy with his shuttle,
Is ever weaving into life's dull warp
Bright, gorgeous flowers and scenes Arcadian ;
Hanging our gloomy prison-house about
With tapestries that make its walls dilate
In never-ending vistas of delight.”

WHEN Mrs Bleecker arrived at home, she requested Clarisse to come to her boudoir. There and then she proposed to give the young girl a word of wholesome caution.

Clarisse, responsive to the summons, came at once. She appeared in a dejected frame of mind, threw herself down on a hassock at Miss Bleecker's feet, placing her elbows upon the little lady's knees, and, resting her chin between the palms of her out-opened hands, assumed a miserable counterfeit of a smile.

“Here I am, all attention.”

The little lady patted the top of her head affectionately.

“Clarisse, my darling, you must be more circumspect in your conduct towards young men, for they often misconstrue an ingenuous act, and accuse a

frank, free-hearted girl like yourself of intentions which she never dreamed." Clarisse looked in distress up into the speaker's face, but sat perfectly mute. "I give you this caution, my dear child, not to find fault with you, but out of pure and simple kindness, and to ward off many unpleasant occurrences in the future."

"Yes, Mrs Bleecker, I know you are perfectly right, and I do thank you so very much for your affectionate interest in me. Will you believe that I have been suffering the tortures of purgatory all day, *à propos* of the bit of thoughtless folly of which I was guilty the other evening?"

"What was it, my child? Perhaps I can adjust the fault."

"The horse-shoe. Honestly, I thought nothing about it myself till Edith put the act before me. She chided me severely for my error, and pointed out to me the same thing respecting my deportment you have hinted. But, in Edith's vehement language, my *faux pas* appeared to be beyond retracing, so I've been miserably unhappy." Clarisse spoke rapidly, her voice and eyes full of tears, her cheeks blazing; the arteries in her temples and throat swelled and receded perceptibly in unison with the throbbing pulsation of her agitated heart. Observing this, Mrs Bleecker drew the girl closer to her, and continued her talk in a very low voice, fraught with comforting assuagement to the young girl.

"Never mind that, Clarisse, only as a lesson. I

can help you out of it at once." Opening her satchel she took out the trinket : " Here, my dear, is the trumpery gawd—the poor, little innocent horseshoe that shod your *faux pas*," handing it to Clarisse, who darted to her feet, clapped her hands, ran to the door, and called in a clarion voice, full of joy :

" Edith ! Edith ! do come here, Mrs Bleecker has such a surprise ! Hurry, Edith !" Returning to Mrs Bleecker's side she kissed the little lady's forehead impulsively two or three times, saying, with a degree of unrestrained gusto she seldom, if ever, indulged in when addressing one so much her senior : " How I thank you ! you have rescued me from censure and ignominy ! That's what a girl's own mother would do, *n'est ce pas ?* you dear, darling dear ! "

Edith came, and Mrs Bleecker, after considerable teasing on the part of the girls, consented to gratify their curiosity to the extent of explaining casually that Mr Rodgers unfortunately was occasionally given to fits of inebriation, when he made too free use of ladies' names. Having been warned to this effect, and that he was on a spree, she had resolved to obtain the little trinket by a round-about manœuvre, so as not to impart undue importance to the incident, as she feared he might retaliate upon Clarisse for the miff she caused him the other evening, leading to the token ; but it was not worth narrating. She charged both the girls to shun Mr Rodgers as they might a venomous reptile.

Clarisse burst out in a wail of distress.

"*Mon Dieu ! Mon Dieu !* Mrs Bleecker ! what shall I do ? what shall I do ? Just think. I wrote to Mr Rodgers to return the token, excusing my apparent boldness for imagining that he would care to retain it, explaining that I prized it because it was a little talismanic keepsake given to me by my former tutor, Count De La Rue, and in its absence I was without a mascot. He has not deigned to reply. Do you think he will make evil use of the note to my harm ?"

For an instant Mrs Bleecker was blank in amazement, when she suddenly recollected that Mr Bacon had destroyed the note.

Without particularising, she assured Clarisse that the note had been utterly destroyed beyond redemption. Moreover, no one was at all likely to credit any statement that he should feel malicious enough to make respecting the circumstance, inasmuch as he no longer possessed either the note or the trinket.

"But, for heaven's sake, Clarisse, *never, never, never* write to any person unless you are sure of your correspondent. I may say *never* write to *any man* unless he is a relative, or you are engaged to him. Letters, my dear child, and the misconception the recipient or an outside party of evil mind may put upon their contents, have, I assure you, caused more actual wretchedness and useless humiliation, brought about more serious dilemmas than aught else throughout the world. It has been so from time immemorial. It will continue till doomsday."

To this edict Edith, like one who had experience in this respect, kept signing assent until the mistress of diplomacy had finished.

"What you have just said, Mrs Bleecker, in spite of its cruelty, is too bitterly true." She spoke sadly. "For this reason I was rather hard on Clarisse. Inasmuch as all has ended well at your hands, let us, as Mr Bleecker would say, 'sing a jubilee,' or 'unfurl the flags to celebrate the glorious victory!' and vow to abstain from future sins of commission of like kind. What do you say, Clarisse?"

"With all my heart, chérie. Do you know, Mrs Bleecker," she spoke thoughtfully, "my soul is in a revolt over the unrealness of my convent education. Just think how shocking it is, that one is taught nothing about these material, practical things of daily life. The innocence of a convent girl assumes the guise of downright ignorance, now that I meet men out of holy orders. I am so grateful, so very very grateful to you, Mrs Bleecker." Then she timorously asked, "What do you think my guardian will say?"

"Good gracious! Clarisse, don't be silly, and make a mountain out of a mole hill. There is no earthly necessity for dwelling on this ephemeral incident any more than there is in communicating to your guardian how sick you were made by imprudently eating bon-bons at Paris, or how your new walking shoes pinched your toes. He's a man of business, and naturally has other much more important things to deal with. I have settled this

unpleasantness, I believe, permanently, so let us all discard it from our thoughts as rubbish."

After delivering this mandate, taken from her exhaustless code of policy, she bade Clarisse and Edith to betake themselves to their rooms, and make their dinner toilets.

Early after dinner, Clarisse excused herself, and sought the retirement of her own room, content in having had her thoughtless indiscretion so admirably wiped out by her faithful ally, Mrs Bleecker, especially as it was in accordance with Dick's views.

Her thoughts soon were basking in the dreamy light of love's enthrallment. She yearned to give herself completely up to its illusionary phantasmagoria, apart from all members of the household. Sitting alone, in the gloaming, looking out of the window upon the stately trees in the square opposite the house, her thoughts were clothed in fancies as varied as the gorgeous tints of the foliage, "*glorified for death*,"—fancies new to her, fancies that stirred her innermost self, fancies striving, imbued with a firstborn love for a lover, set her pulses thrilling, quickening an unknown delight, tinged her present with a roseate hue, and prompted longings for companionship and responsiveness.

"Oh, if Dick only knew how I love him, I am sure he would make some sign and relieve me of this suspense." Then she thought with sickening dread, "Perhaps he loves some one else—perhaps

he is pledged to another—perhaps he is, after all, indifferent to me. Ah, no, for I feel now more irresistibly than ever that, unless he too loves me, he could not draw me to him as he does.” Her cheeks had glowed rose-red, she evinced an impatience as she stretched out her arms and clasped her hands impressively in the uncertain light, and continued to soliloquize with renewed fervour :

“ Dick, bid me come to you, and I will fly to your arms ; bid me forsake all this earth contains and come to you, and I will not hesitate, only *love me !* Let my love, my devotion carry a fulness of life to you, that will be worthy of your noble nature ! ”

This frail lily was being tossed about in the sweep of a tempestuous simoon. She had never experienced a sentiment approaching a passion before. The thoughts she now indulged in, so personal, so sacred to her, she felt must be carefully treasured and hidden from the knowledge of even Edith. Thus it was, in a few brief hours, her utter frankness had been transformed. She was ready to assume a disguise, willing to entertain a secret, eager to sound the depths of the unrevealed. Her love could have but one confidant outside of her own heart. Her duty discovered itself to her in a new phase. The horizon of her world had suddenly extended into new domains. Love, her passport, was strange to no language.

Why, oh why cannot mortals be dowered with power of discernment which might open up the

secrets of each other's hearts, empowering each lover and beloved to comprehend at inception, love's wondrous cadences? No, it needs must be that the quickening comes too often with mournful dread, lest the passion be not reciprocated and shall be harshly repulsed. Fate seldom bestows this benison without first subjecting to all manner of difficult, harassing ordeals those she aims to bless in the end.

"Does love ever come like a flash of lightning?" Clarisse queried to herself, "or does it rather creep upon one like a growing vine, spreading out its tendrils in all directions, which to uproot needs must result in its total destruction, and in the defacement of the most sturdy structure of granite over which it has crept?" Then she thought she had flushed with pleasure the first time she saw Dick. She had not experienced anything akin for his three friends, nor in good truth for other mortal, before or since. Yet she could mind well how, day by day, so gradually but firmly, her attachment for him had unfolded. Somehow Dick to her always appeared to be labouring under great restraint when alone in her presence. Why? Surely he must be able to divine her true feelings. Yet he had never lisped to her one direct word, not one word which might not have been interpreted otherwise, to convey reciprocity of her sentiment on his part. She believed, mainly because she so wished, that he preferred to make his endless acts speak more eloquently than fulsome hackneyed words.

"Certainly," she murmured, "in a thousand ways Dick has proved his love for me." Then came the nameless dread lest her guardian might offer some opposition to her choice. This thought dyed her face crimson. Pride flung a mantle of burning mortification over her for indulging in such indelicate dreaming. For, after all, it was *her choice* of Dick, and not Dick's choice of her. It was unmaidenly.

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! les convenances, toujours les convenances. C'est terrible!"

Soon her reverie reverted to her life at school in the convent. Like an echo returned the many cautions, wise hints of life's precarious and devious paths, which Count De La Rue had poured into her ears during the last year of her sojourning, when he knew the time inevitable approached at a rapid rate for her to take up her new life in a foreign land. He was a cynic ever. She recalled one time in particular he was teaching her a love-ditty, how he scoffed at the idea embodied in the words, of a destiny in love.

The words came softly tripping from her lips—

"The stars come nightly to the sky,
The tidal wave unto the sea,
Nor time, nor space, nor deep, nor high,
Can keep my own away from me."

Something special dwelt in the words for her to-night. Ah, well, if it were so to be, it must be. She could wait and trust to destiny.

How little did she apprehend the almost tragic

trial Dick was passing through in her behalf while she sat so blissfully preening Fancy for flights to empyrean regions of delight !

Where then were all those fabled emissaries appointed to guard and inform souls which are affinities, of the peril or joy of one another ?

How was it possible for her to thus sit in utter unconsciousness of Dick's encounter at the club with Jasper ? How could she sleep subsequently, and not be haunted by the spectres which stalked through her guardian's recital of his sorrows ?

To these problems the answers must remain unspoken until the unveiling of all mysteries in the great Hereafter.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONNECTING LINKS.

“ Was a woman of genius : whose genius indeed
With her life was at war. Once, but once in that life
The chance had been hers to escape from this strife
In herself ; finding peace in the life of another,
From the passionate wants she in hers failed to smother.”

HERBERT SEVERANCE stole cautiously up to Dick's chamber the morning after their extraordinary experiences and interview, fearful that his nephew might be seriously indisposed. Seeing his uncle's face peering through the open door, clothed by an expression of asking dread, Dick saluted him with good-natured pleasantry.

“ In words of your pet statesman the illustrious Dan, ‘ I'm not dead yet ! ’ Uncle, I've something very personal to confide to you, the moment you've completed the history of your life's sorrow. I hope you'll lose no time, for I burn with desire to surprise you.”

“ Very well, Dick, after you've had a cup of coffee, a bath, and that inevitable shave, I'll do so. . . . How do you find yourself all in all this morning ? ”

“ As fine as a fiddle strung up to concert pitch ! ”

“That’s good. Come down soon, my boy, to the library,” and Herbert Severance descended with a heavy heart to await his nephew’s appearance. He half regretted in the garish daylight having been beguiled into telling Dick his heart history. Repinings were of no avail now, he must brave it through to the end.

The facts relating to the ghost in his whited sepulchre, as told to Dick, can be summarised as follows :—

Clarisse Arditte loved truly and fondly Herbert Severance, but the domesticity of matrimonial existence was all new and quite foreign to her. Success and its resultant sway over the public possessed a rare charm for this lovely child-woman. She gloried in her powers, and each day found it more difficult, more of a hardship, to think of resigning her vantage ground. Whereas on the contrary, had she made a failure, and the bounteous love of Herbert Severance then offered his fortune, his position, to her wounded pride as a refuge, she would have eagerly accepted the shelter from the rough winds and sleeting frost of failure, with a sense of gratitude and relief; but at the very zenith of her popularity, at a time when the world bowed obsequiously at her feet, when she was bidden by royal command to sing before crowned heads, a pet at court, overwhelmed by fortune, by favour,—an unparalleled success, professionally as well as socially, at such a time the thought of abdicating in favour of some would-be rival was like

welcoming banishment from a resplendent realm to a barren waste. She could not supinely tolerate the idea, at least not then.

Alone in her chamber, removed from the delirium of this sort of life, she strove earnestly to adapt herself uncomplainingly to the inevitable, for she realised it must surely come, and come very soon. She made sterling, masterful efforts to overcome or subjugate to other things the pride she took in her glorious career. For the moment she would be resolved to abjure forthwith the bewitching glitter and attraction of her operatic life for the narrow sphere of wife. Just as often did she strenuously renounce her resolve, when some new public conquest added a fresh glamour to her illusionary estate. Then she grew sick at heart, and repented her of her marriage.

Constantly surrounded by impresarios, journalists, and professionals, who unceasingly depicted to her a destiny unknown to any other singer, she felt a latent taunt in the insinuating remarks, tinged with mocking pity, she heard on all sides, namely, that the time approached at a winged-pace when this child of genius should be snatched from her royally earned empire. Doubtless the favoured suitor was above reproach, but the true, unbiased genius should wed art alone. A scathing acrimony emphasised these foregone regrets, voiced here and there amongst the coteries of admirers who ever dance attendance at the shrine of the successful *diva*. Try as she might to inure herself to their

carpings, every breath in this direction tended to shake her belief that she had chosen wisely. She was gradually imbued with a spirit of repining that became stronger than her resolves.

In her infatuating quest for more and more exalted fame, her heart insensibly played the wanton. It was so noble to dedicate one's self without reserve to the talent God had bestowed. Then came to back her up a vague sense of martyrdom—a mere lapse of a sore conscience, possibly to avoid self-blame. Was it not, in point of fact, selfish and shirking in her to so soon forsake the work and incessant struggle requisite to reach the loftiest goal, for personal happiness, for a life all *colour de rose*, remote from individual moil, and peaceably sink inactively back into the lap of indolent luxury?

How these queries made her beat about seeking a safe anchorage! How doubt, like a masked demon, surreptitiously crept in to haunt the wavering spirit of this faltering one!

Anon, her other self, her dual antithesis, reprimanded the errant one, and as faithfully rehabilitated her in the desire to live with the aim of finding "peace in the life of another," and lovingly devote herself to make Herbert happy, away, far away from the noisy fray, freed from the artificiality of all the false round of semblances: to be simply Clarisse, the wife of Herbert Severance, seemed at these times her sheet anchor.

A "*Kirmess*" to be given under the patronage

of the Empress Eugénie for the benefit of the Hospital of the *Nouveau Né*, to be held in the gardens of the Tuileries, was an occasion for which Clarisse was besought by the Empress in person to preside at a flower bazaar. It was customary for all artistes of renown to proffer their services upon similar occasions for *réclame*, therefore, to be sought and not seek, was esteemed an exceptional honour, and rare manifest of royal favour that Clarisse could not resist.

Here all Paris flocked. The most extortionate prices were recklessly bid for the flowers, until soon every bud and leaf was sold. Then her *bouquet de corsage* was sought as a guerdon. A shower of golden louis poured upon each leaf she touched. At the finish an aspirant for approbation audaciously made a startling bid for the "*glove of Mademoiselle*." In all innocence she began to draw off the glove, whereat the bids, in over-riding rivalry, grew deafening. She, full of excitement over the monetary result, kept enticing fresh bidders by little pert asides, suggestive shrugs of her shoulders, and *moues*, implying that at their niggardly prices the precious article would be sacrificed. She shook her head with irresistible coquetry, anon darted a glance of solicitation to a *monsieur* who was craning his neck as he stood on tiptoe to show himself above the throng, and announce a princely sum. The sum was fabulous. She could not hope to increase it, and concluded to close the bargain.

High above the din of voices came the words,

"If mademoiselle will kiss the purchaser, I'll double the money for the other glove!"

An instant sufficed. Herbert Severance clutched the insolent wretch by the throat, and was crushing him with brutal violence down under his feet upon the ground, absolutely blinded out of all reason by his fury.

No one interfered. He was Clarisse's recognised champion. Although many frantically gesticulated and fairly shrieked as they jabbered excitedly, some protesting the chastisement was too harsh, others approving with a menacing air, Clarisse, as one inspired, although much terrified by the wild *mêlée*, pale as death, in a clear ringing voice burst out in a simple popular ballad—

"Would'st that I lov'd thee."

As by magic the angry turmoil was lulled, Herbert Severance, like one under a sudden spell, unloosed his grip. The disgraced culprit arose, clothed in a better manhood, elbowed through the crowd, his head bowed in deep humiliation, and said, so all might hear with distinctness:

"Mademoiselle, I'm covered with shame, and contritely sue for pardon." A faint hiss was the fuse to kindle the most explosive cheers. Clarisse with loveable graciousness granted her forgiveness.

"Oh! Monsieur, *I am so sorry*," she sweetly said.

Hearing of the *finesse* exhibited by her favourite, the Empress sent by one of her courtiers a royal command for the *diva* to dine at the palace, with

the assurance, "Mademoiselle shall not be detained so as to make her late for the opera."

Clarisse, flushed with delight over the public homage conferred so openly upon her by the Empress's mark of approbation, expressed her grateful acceptance with winning dignity. She left the gardens forthwith midst the din of acclamation, to make her preparations, accompanied by Herbert, who had not yet recovered from his recent agitation. He touched his hat in forgiveness as he passed the Frenchman.

"I wish it had not happened," regretfully said Clarisse. "Herbert, for the first time have I been made to feel the mortification of a scathing insult. Oh, to think that blatant men should dare bid for my kisses! Is it not too degrading?"

"Yes, I think so, my darling. I should have killed the impudent varlet without compunction, had you not called me back just in time to reason by your song. Oh, Clarisse! Clarisse! I entreat you to renounce at once a career which renders you liable to such abominable outrages! This is your last night in Paris, make it your last night on the stage. For my sake, renounce henceforth its shams, its mockeries, its hollow enticements, and let us live apart from the defilement and hideousness of this leering, hooting multitude!"

This fervent appeal, coming in the hour of her chagrin, almost set an unbreakable seal upon her resolve to give it all up at once; but the dinner! She must hasten and make her toilet.

Herbert watched her with longing sad eyes drive away without him. It was Court etiquette, nevertheless he was not reconciled to the humbuggery of an etiquette requiring these ceremonious strictures. He had temporarily forgotten that their marriage was clandestine, hence he was cringing from an unintended slight. His reluctance to submit to the usages of Court customs was born in this instance of his unhappy frame of mind. Love had shot into his splendid heart a poisoned arrow—jealousy—to rankle and embitter his existence, yet he would have sternly repudiated such a charge as beneath consideration.

He jealous? Of whom? Of what? He, the happiest of mortals, the most blessed of men, he indulge in a sentiment so demeaning! Most assuredly not jealous! But it was tiresome to put up with, ireful to know that any individual, of high or mean and low degree, old or young, had the privilege, by the payment of an admission fee, to gaze upon her transcendent beauty, had the right to regale themselves within sound of her voice—hers!—or applaud according as their vulgar taste or fractious humour might dictate! It was simply insufferable.

Then the enforced association with men and women without moral standing in the profession he could but condemn, and resent with unconcealed displeasure. Did he wish to make of his beloved an odalisque? Yes, that or anything, to seclude her from the rude odious gaze of the mul-

titude, and ward off the professional contact with foul-mouthed men, even if they were renowned singers. He detested the whole business. It hurt him on all sides.

Singular phase of masculine mind, the woman a man adores, in the extravagance of his passion to whom he bends a worshipful knee, whom he looks reverentially up to as a goddess upon a towering pedestal, before whom he avows his unworthy estate, that he should dare essay to the full exclusive possession and enthrallment of the same woman, and, in his egotism, fancy he can replace to her all the dazzling world he implores her to surrender for him. And that he dares think his personal attributes are all-sufficing, when she once is his wife, to efface every hope, every yearning, outside his orbit! Dull of memory, he forgets that he pursued, waylaid, tried by every art to entrap the woman, hindered and circumvented every other wooer; and possibly the pseudo devotion evinced by his besetting importunities drove the girl, out of sheer inability to withstand, to accept him before she knew herself, before she had half a chance to know what order of man was her match.

The man's life continues, as a rule, undisturbed on the same scale of liberty, but the woman's becomes exactly what he makes it for her, unless she possesses a wayward, independent disposition, or be not over-scrupulous when she finds herself thwarted, or in a desperate stress over her inexorable state *if* she discovers a kindred soul elsewhere.

Certain vagaries, the very antithesis to sordid facts, had always taxed Herbert Severance in the old days. He had felt, in any case, the grievance must be the man's.

Clarisse's reception by the Emperor and Empress was accounted a triumph allotted but to few in her profession. Her loveliness and chaste beauty attracted great admiration and pronounced homage. The exquisite texture of her skin, the brilliant whiteness of her complexion, with the varying flushing of her cheeks, and the crimson of her sensuous sensitive lips, were not due to stage artifices. Nature had lavishly endowed this gifted girl with both rare physical health and beauty.

The exciting episode of the afternoon had imparted to her an excessive degree of animation. She gave *mot* for *mot*, and was the centre of attention.

- Almost at the close of the dinner, the Empress addressed her with marked complacency :

"Mademoiselle Arditte, to your superb beauty Monsieur le Count De La Rue owes his title. We are not mistaken in assuming that you were his distinguished model for his celebrated *chef d'œuvre* ?"

Clarisse blushed crimson, and burned with confusion for a moment. Quickly regaining her self-possession, she bowed, and attempted a rejoinder.

"Your gracious Majesty flatters me. I posed merely for the face. Does your Majesty like the tableau ?"

"So much so that we are the possessors of it.

If you pass into the adjoining salon, you may behold it in its place of honour."

The Emperor extended to Clarisse his hand, conducted her into the salon indicated with as much pomp as if she had been royalty. There was the picture "*Souvenir*," placed on an easel below a portrait of the Empress.

As they stood gazing at it, the Emperor with blandishment commented upon the inefficacy of art to portray Mademoiselle's matchless beauty. In an undertone, purposely vague to evoke Clarisse's strict attention, he remarked with true Latin *esprit*:

"We regret exceedingly, Mademoiselle, we are not a Louis Seize, but, we account ourselves even more than he, or a double Louis d'or, when above all we are your slave!"

It might have been only a *façon de parler*, none the less a shiver crept over Clarisse. The words carried to her fanciful imagination an import she did not feel able to cope with.

Noticing the involuntary tremor, the Emperor queried if she felt cold. She frankly attributed the act to nervousness common to artistes. Still her embarrassment was obvious, and to relieve her if possible, he turned the conversation.

"We shall do ourselves the pleasure of listening to your *Majesty*, the peerless *Queen of Song*, to-night. We trust your *Majesty* may outshine herself, if miracles be possible!"

She curtsied deferentially, for this was no mean evidence of his "distinguished consideration." After

a certain incumbent ceremony attending her adieus, Clarisse found herself in her *coupé* speeding to the opera house. At the stage entrance Herbert awaited her, and with gladsome heart conducted her to her dressing-room.

She was overflowing with exhilaration; over her countenance spread a radiance quite different from the customary brightness which ever beautified her face. Herbert looked at her in admiration, and warmed up to effusive compliments.

“Your beauty is perfectly ravishing to-night! If you reflect the enjoyment of your reception, surely you have used the Emperor’s crown for a footstool, and have had all France harlequining for your amusement! Let the Emperor have his crown and his madcap France. I say with Antony, give him—

‘This rattle of a globe to play withal,
This gew-gaw world, and put him cheaply off;
I’ll not be pleased with less than Cleopatra.’”

And he imprinted an ardent kiss upon her lips.

Clarisse was not displeased with this outgush of pure ecstasy from Herbert. He revelled in her conquest and in her beauty; once he had her near him for a few undivided moments, unshared, uninterrupted by others.

It was widespread that the Emperor and Empress would honour the opera on this particular night, hence the house was packed with a brilliant jewelled assembly of notable personages, the *élite*

of Paris, the entire Court. The royal *loge* was gorgeously adorned with flowers and silken banners. The entire house was brilliant with the French colours. As usual when an artist was *fêted* by their august highnesses everything was retarded, everything awaited their serene pleasure. Punctuality is too servile a trait, too plebeian to hamper royalty. Presently the ominous hum of voices, the rustle and stir of rising people, made manifest their arrival. Then came long, swelling, deafening shouts, "*Vive l'Empereur ! Vive l'Impératrice ! Vive la France !*"

Clarisse was in remarkably fine voice. Thrice the Emperor condescended to reach out of his box, and present her each time with a magnificent floral offering, to which was affixed a rare and costly gawd. One of the three, unique in design, represented a soaring nightingale crowned with stars, upbearing in its claws the world, on which appeared miniatures of the Emperor and Empress. The others were infinitely more conspicuous as to value, but not nearly so significant.

During the *entr'acte* the Empress insisted upon Clarisse presenting herself in the royal box. Here she was greeted with vociferous cheers—for this people was not indifferent to the Empress's choice. Anon, the Emperor sought her dressing-room, to express in person their delectation, and renew his personal plaudits, assuring her in his own captivating way :

"Mademoiselle, you are Queen of a realm, to

which no pretender can lay claim, as to other empires." He kissed her hand, and returned to his box.

She went before the footlights again, but not with the unconscious zeal nor *élan* with which she had heretofore sung her *rôle*. She seemed to be dissembling to herself. She felt the Emperor's eyes upon her. She observed the audience significantly regarding, first the Emperor, who was most demonstrative, then looking at her. What did it all mean? She grew dizzy, was on the verge of stage-fright. The tenor's voice was growing dimmer and dimmer, everything was receding in wavy mists. Instinctively she knew that the orchestra was repeating, *this* sounded the tocsin of warning. Only by a supreme effort of will did she overcome the impending horror. A tremendous exertion restored her artistic *aplomb*. She no longer saw the Emperor. The sea of faces presented to her only a crowded collection of white spots and dots, interspersed with splashes of colour and flashing jewels. She sang:

The audience was electrified, wild enthusiasm prevailed. She exceeded herself. Her heart, her soul seemed to be scintillating and melting into notes. This was her farewell. It was a triumph not soon to be forgotten in the annals of the musical world.

Nestling timidly but trustingly in Herbert's arms as they drove home, she murmured:

"It is, as you said, all unreal. I am cheating myself, and becoming consumed through delusions.

Should I falter, fail, lose my beauty, this same public would hiss me without mercy!" Herbert interrupted her with a comforting sally:

"Now, my darling, you can say, like Mme. Pompadour, '*Après nous le deluge*,' for you have reached the very summit of fame's pinnacle."

Offers poured in upon her from every noted impresario. To all she replied in the negative, averring that she was married, and going to America to live in retirement.

Clarisse was positively sincere in the latter statement, and in her belief that she should do so. Somehow she had experienced a sudden distaste for her career, notwithstanding the achievement of her last night in Paris.

Habit constituted a clog to Clarisse's good resolves. She missed her study, her rehearsals, the costumiers, the photographers, the excitement; aye, and a thousand things immaterial considered separately, but banished by one fell swoop, left blanks, made long gruesome hours of absolute inertia which hung heavily upon her. She constantly sought to find out whatever did people do with themselves who had no work, no study. How could they endure their aimless dalliance in a method of life so ambiguous to her? In course of time she drifted into a new untried channel for amusement. She could now read the delightful books she had so long craved to delve into, but till now time had failed her.

Unfortunately, Herbert Severance's tastes in

literature were certainly not wholesome for a young impressionable mind like hers. In view of a long-contemplated journey to the Orient, he had collected all sorts of books treating upon the cults of Buddhism. He had also a number of German metaphysical works and French books without number on psychological themes, besides a long list of romances impinging on strange if not occult influences.

With the contrariety of her sex, Clarisse lighted upon these books, and above all became unduly interested in the general subject matter of the pagan cults.

She quizzed Herbert daily concerning the various theories therein laid forth, always winding up with, "Do you believe that?"

One day she launched out in a most aggressive way, after propounding a series of questions extremely averse in their import, and difficult to answer.

"Well, according to your statement, instead of our being free agents, we are creatures of fate! I have always believed so, although I have never dared assert my belief before."

Herbert immediately averted further discussion, and determined in his own mind to start on a journey to distract Clarisse's attention from a line of reflections he now deemed pernicious. In due course, so as not to exhibit the slightest degree of peculiarity by a too sudden change of intention, which might arouse her suspicions as to his ulterior pur-

pose, he announced his short-sighted plan, offering as an excuse for not returning to America at once, as they had heretofore arranged, that his father expressly wished him to visit the Orient before going back.

She was not only willing, but impatient that they should be off without delay. She seconded every suggestion Herbert made on this score—lent her thought and energy to complete their purchases to make ready for an expedition likely to involve two years' absence.

Herbert was jubilant over the effect of his new scheme upon Clarisse, especially insomuch as he had anticipated much opposition and some compatible objections on her part. She in turn went carolling from morning till night about their apartment without thinking of aught but their journey, and talked unceasingly about the enjoyment they should derive.

One morning at table, as they were finishing breakfast, Clarisse interrupted Herbert in some remark he was making.

"Herbert, does your father know you are married?" she said quite irrelevantly. "And to me?"

He laughed good-naturedly.

"My darling, you are becoming really inquisitorial these days. First you put me in pillory as to articles of faith, then lo, and behold, you put the thumb-screws on me concerning my family?"

"Yes, but, Herbert, you have not answered me."

I ask again in all seriousness, does your father know that you are married? And to me?"

"Yes! He knows I am married. I sent him a copy of the consular certificate, so he knows; also to whom."

Herbert, does he know I was a singer?"

"No, my dear, I presume not, but why concern yourself about this affair? In time he will have the pleasure of knowing and loving you in person, my darling."

Clarisse looked up reproachfully.

"I should despise you, or any one who would dare insult me by accepting me under protest, and merely tolerate me because of you! . . . No! No! I could not endure such a cruel, cruel wrong. It would break my heart! I should ever regret giving up my career for the degrading pettiness and ignominy of such a life!" She allowed herself to be carried on in a frantic denunciation of evils never to befall her. Herbert in amazement had risen and stood behind her, clasping her head tenderly against his chest. In a soothing, caressing manner he stroked her forehead and patted her cheeks gently.

"You are perfectly insured against any treatment from any source which could cause you one qualm of regret, or give you pain, *dear one*," he said with quiet assurance; "you will command, by your own exquisite womanly loveliness, the deference of all who may be privileged to know you. Be comforted, you are not well, sweetheart. Your

imagination is overcast by some passing cloud to-day, to-morrow all will be sunshine and joy. Come, sing for me."

The shadow passed, and her sunny face resumed its untroubled sweetness. She acquiesced in his request, and sitting down at the piano, sang her favourite aria from *Ernani* — the first rôle she had ever learned, and her favourite music. Her voice was rich in pathetic, dramatic fulness, touched by her mood. Herbert, rapt, listened deeply moved. Abruptly she stopped, swung round on the piano stool, without heeding Herbert's plaudits, and started off on another subject.

"Do you know, Herbert, I can never forget what Gustave Doré told me about his picture the *Neophyte*, and the sequel! I felt it sink into my soul then. To-day, I feel in this great hard world, amid sage folk, with all their hardening experiences, sufferings, abnegations, wickedness, and crushed souls, much as did that fresh young *Neophyte* amid the old monks, whilst they thriddled their rosary between their trembling fingers—old, foolish, tottering, senile, sardonic, crafty, two-faced religionists—whilst I, as he, poor simple *Neophyte* that I am, have said rashly, I'll be one with you, and am terrified in their midst! Then, Herbert, I wonder if some hapless day I too, like the other *Neophyte*, may not bemoan my lost life, my song-world? These thoughts come, I cannot check them. . . . I do not seek to foster them. I feel insensibly drawn by irresistible bonds to return to

the intoxicating pomp and splendour, and once again lose myself, in the wild vertigo of my successes ! . . . My pulses rage wildly, making thrill every atom of my sentient being ! I feel like a captive straining to free myself from bondage. Oh ! Herbert ! Herbert ! save me from these thoughts. They dethrone my reason. I am so *unhappy*, so *very unhappy* !” She sobbed as though her heart would break.

The man was non-plussed. This was a revelation requiring more than casual consideration to deal with sagaciously. He could only fondle her, and affectionately urge some diversion to take herself out of herself. They were both passionate equestrians, and he forthwith decided upon a ride in the *Bois*.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONFESSION.

“ But it's strange.

And oftentimes to soothe us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths ;
Win us with honest trifles, to betray us
In deepest consequences.”

RIDING through the avenue of acacias, Clarisse and Herbert met Count De La Rue, likewise on horse, taking, as he said, “ a dash for diz-track-shun.” He joined them with their permission, and felicitated himself upon the good luck which had thrown himself across their genial path, as he was “ possessed by a squadron of blue devils.”

Jogging along at a rocking-horse pace, during the course of conversation Herbert intimated their intention to start almost immediately for the Orient.

“ Madam is not well, and requires a change of scene and air.”

An almost imperceptible wince was the only sign of surprise evinced by Count De La Rue at this announcement. He proposed, if entirely agreeable to them, he was strongly of the mind to join their party. For a long time he averred he had been extremely desirous of visiting the Orient. Heretofore he had

been disinclined to set out alone, or to accept the indifferent companionship offered.

"But, Monsieur and Madam, if *you* will allow me, *c'est une bonne chance! Très ravissant!*" he concluded with French effusiveness.

Clarisse, aglow with delight, for she liked the Count, said, with naïve impressiveness she always exhibited by the prospect of fresh pleasure:

"What a glorious chance for us to have your society, Monsieur! I presume you will make some rich studies of the Orient? Just think, Monsieur, of the lovely women, their luscious complexions and great melting gazelle eyes, almond-shaped, like waning moons; the dreamy languor in their movements, their tropical luxuriance, all set off by their picturesque apparel of magnificent stuffs so gorgeously embroidered. Living as they do in an atmosphere charged with subtle, intoxicating perfumes, the very thought of which makes my blood tingle, is it a wonder they are mystics? The writhing, gliding *Del Sartian* gestures as they dance, accompanied by weird music, to which we can but contrast the noisy music and the *tour de force* of the modern ballet. I shall be fascinated by it all, I feel certain I shall. . . . Ah, Monsieur! you will indeed, find great and novel art treasure to inspire you!"

"Possibly, Madam does not know, that my art aspirations are already gratified to the extreme, I may say finished? I do not voyage there to paint, nor to procure material for future composition, *au contraire*, Madam, but to live and enjoy a life freed from the grovelling exigencies of my profession."

Clarisse shook her head incredulously.

"We shall see, Monsieur, *au contraire!*" Then she turned to Herbert, "Do you remember that extraordinary story of Tourgeniff's called 'The Song of Triumphant Love'? It made an indelible impression upon me. The unearthly marvels produced by the mystics, the violin playing, the *diablement* of the music enticing the woman, and last, the restoration of the lover back to life by the Malay's magic! *Mon Dieu*, how that story haunts me! I seem to understand the resistless attraction of that fatal music; but—but—some way I don't comprehend *why* the husband killed the lover!" Herbert looked at her almost dumbfounded. Whatever could ail her?

"Clarisse!" he exclaimed.

"*Presto!* Herbert, see it's all gone," and she laughed in a musical, rippling way that made the very birds linger mid-air on motionless wings.

Count De La Rue, not content to accept the happy *coup* Madam had so charmingly effected, renewed the topic.

"Madam, I confess I am also peculiarly interested in those strange people and their weird cults. I am drawn to investigate the forms of pagan religion, which are far more ancient than those of Christianity." Then he addressed himself to Herbert: "Monsieur, it is to you I owe a vast obligation for having been the first source of any accurate knowledge I acquired of the Orient. Monsieur, as you are my *savant*, it is to you

I shall certainly look as my future mentor, when umbrageous occultism shall befog my comprehension." His whole manner was insinulative, his words struck Herbert's ear unpleasantly.

"I protest, most positively, that each must make his or her own departure from the beaten paths and dogmas of Christianity, and draw their own personal deductions. I forswear any such prodigious responsibility, and will not become spiritual linkman for any mortal."

"For shame, Herbert! to repudiate your followers and devotees in this way. What will become of us?" petulantly said Clarisse.

"You must be your own dooms-men. I'll throw no mysterious shuttle across your looms, mainly because, for a fact, I'm so ignorant myself. However, let's have the good common sense to calmly await our arrival in the domain of this mooted mysticism. Let us see first if we care to pry into either the secrets of the life or the religion of those people. Their *Nirvâna* may be uninteresting.

"Then, Monsieur Severance, I infer that you hold religion and life apart?" Count De La Rue spoke in a satirical tone, emitting between his closed teeth, which were exposed by the sneer that curled his lips, an unnatural chuckle. Hearing it, Clarisse turned suddenly and gazed at him. Disturbed and perplexed, she tried to grasp the under-current of the thought which could find expression in such a disagreeable act.

"*Mon ami*," retorted Herbert, "I had no idea

that you were so hypercritical as to the ethics of speech. Individuals and peoples do live without religion. You see enough of this sort of thing in France. Religion is a species of deportment. In fine, I hold extremely peculiar views on these subjects—I mean life and religion. It would, indeed, be utterly impossible to clearly delineate to another's comprehension my vagaries, should I expatiate thereupon for the stretch of four-and-twenty hours. Besides, they sink into insignificance when we look about and consider the beauties of nature with which we are surrounded."

De La Rue's face at Herbert's last words assumed an expression of annoyance.

"*Tiens, tiens*, Count! do be jolly! We are out for pleasure, not for philosophy. *Voilà!* this is the *Bois*, not the *Forum!*" laughingly uttered Clarisse, as she swung her whip-lash across her horse's haunches and put him into a canter, followed by the others.

"Well, Dick, we three went to the *accursed* Orient. . . . A week before the birth of our child, a cable announcing the serious illness of my father made it imperative that I should return without delay to America if I wished to see him alive. . . . With reluctance I committed Clarisse to the care of a physician in whom I had great confidence for his superior skill. . . . When I was on the eve of departure, her heart seemed wrung with such inordinate despair, I felt sorely shaken as

to whether my duty lay in going to my father or in stopping with my wife. . . . Witnessing the dire strait in which I was plunged, she pluckily gathered a degree of self-control, and courageously declared that I must without a doubt go to my father. . . . This self-sacrifice on her part inspired me with renewed adoration for the brave little woman. I summoned Count De La Rue to my private room, to request at his hands the greatest favour I could possibly require from another man,"—the speaker drifted away for a moment, but with one of his characteristic right-about, resumed,—“namely, to vigilantly protect and kindly minister to my precious wife during my absence.

“My God! Dick, this worse than devil pledged himself under most solemn oath to accept the sacred charge. He avowed he would rather die than abuse or neglect the sacred token of confidence reposed by me in him. . . . Clarisse was not displeased when I communicated this step to her. She expressed gratitude for my consideration, extolled my forethought in planning for her well-being, and repeatedly thanked me for providing so tried a friend.—I must tell you, Dick, De La Rue had remained with us from the time we left France.—It would be a comfort for her to be able to call upon someone in my absence, whom I had selected, in whom I had confidence, whom she might trust as a brother. . . .

“When I arrived in New York harbour a cablegram was placed in my hands, setting aside all my

fears, ‘*Wife and daughter well.*’” Herbert Severance’s eyes snapped, and his face was radiant as he looked at Dick, filled with the enthusiasm of an imperishable memory.

“Dick, I fairly reeled with joy that day! I was foolishly excited over the news, conducting myself in a noticeably extravagant fashion. There was something indescribable in the idea that I was a father, that Clarisse was a mother, awakening a consciousness of a realm of feeling undiscovered heretofore. I kept straightening myself up to every speck of my height, tugged at my waistcoat, threw back my shoulders, and breathed with an expansion and inflation of lungs most abnormal. . . . This comical sense of self-importance, that comes, I believe, only with the first-born, was felt so irresistibly within my heart, I wanted the whole world to be jubilant with me, and share my bliss.

“Even then, Dick, it flashed across my elated brain that perhaps my daughter, then no older in hours than were you in years, and you, Dick, might some day be nearer and dearer than cousins!

“I congratulated myself over the beneficence of God in sparing for the child her mother to care for her. Contrasting how different your fate, my dear boy, deprived at your birth of the tender love of a mother, and almost immediately after losing your father, I resolved on the prompting of these thoughts to redouble my care for you.”

“Uncle, I’m sure you did. You have been all the world to me,” fervently affirmed Dick.

“Soon my ecstatic bliss was beclouded by my father’s death. The circumstances were peculiar, involving a complicated lawsuit in the adjustment of his estate. This required my constant undivided personal attention for many months. I assure you, only the most stringent exercise of will kept me from frequently giving way to my yearning to return to my wife and child, and abandon the sordid law business. But my father’s honour was threatened with impeachment if in litigation a certain dubious transaction was not cleared up. This, and this only, kept me. . . . One day came the shocking news that our child had succumbed to some infantile malady, and died. My heart was wrenched with cruel poignancy. I could not rid myself from the pity I felt for my poor, dear Clarisse, away, far away, alone in her grief amongst strangers. It would surely shatter her health and spirits. . . . The tenor of her letters became constrained. I experienced renewed solicitude. . . . She never alluded to Count De La Rue, in her late epistles. . . . He had long ceased to write. . . . Could it be that he had grown weary of his charge through my protracted absence? If so, then indeed Clarisse was alone. . . . I refrained from asking her, dreading to revive some regret. . . . Tormented by these imaginary afflictions, I concluded at any cost, to imperil if needs be, everything, and fly to her side at once.

“At this juncture I received a letter, brighter in its import, stating, through Count De La Rue’s advice, and accepting his most unselfish escort, she

was on the eve of making a journey to Switzerland, where she would wait for me. This partially relieved my anxiety. I felt quieted to think Count De La Rue had been loyal to me, and forthwith wrote him in a most grateful strain. . . . Presently I was at liberty to rejoin my wife. I found her sadly altered mentally, her exquisite physical beauty faded, although to me enhanced by a touch of sadness I attributed to the sorrow of a mother's heart over her bereavement. Her praises of De La Rue's abnegating devotion to her during her illness and subsequent afflictions, were without bounds. In an inexplicable way I felt displaced by him, found his constant presence in our midst was marring our unity and contentment. . . . In truth, inadvertently, Clarisse had contracted a habit of deferring to him with an innocent disregard of my rights to be consulted in our own personal affairs, or, as it were, to be master in my own house. Occasionally she would realise the audaciousness of her act. My ensuing confusion would sting her with deep mortification, then she would try in every way to soothe the wound inflicted upon my dignity. However, there was undeniably some subtle and harmful estrangement between us that nothing could gloss over. Its existence awed me. . . . De La Rue readily sensed the situation, and, with praiseworthy tact, he decided to journey to another point without us. . . . After his departure, Clarisse became as one in a dream, was absent-minded, did everything

with an unconcealed forced effort. . . . What it all meant, what it portended, I was perplexed to conceive. To my oft-repeated questions if she were well and happy, ever came the unqualified response :

“ ‘ Yes, perfectly.’ ”

Herbert Severance paused so long and appeared to lapse into an unconsciousness, Dick touched his arm.

“ Well, uncle, continue.”

“ Oh, I beg your pardon, Dick, I was thinking so rapidly, I forgot to speak. Furthermore, Dick, it requires a tremendous effort for me to unbosom myself, I’m of a very reticent nature. However, I’ll proceed. . . . For a long time I refrained from asking her about her child, whom, as you know, was born and died during my absence. Finally, with an aching heart one day, when she appeared more abstracted than ever, I ventured to enquire. Bursting out in tears she stammered, between sobs, ‘ Don’t speak of her! For God’s sake, spare me that agony!’ I never mentioned the subject after. . . .

“ My business agents clamoured ungently for me to come to America. Clarisse pled with me to permit her to remain where she was until my return—we had gone back to France. She preferred the entailed solitude rather than to be subjected, while she was mourning the loss of our child, to the trying ordeal of meeting or mingling with strangers. There was nothing unreasonable

in this. I consented. . . . Without her knowledge I sent a messenger to Count De La Rue to explain the circumstances of the case, at the same time, requesting him as a trusted friend, to once again assume the charge of my beloved wife, during the period, long or short, of my enforced absence. . . . Instead of committing his answer to the messenger, but, with what I deemed a mark of rare delicacy and proof of his attached friendship, he forthwith rejoined us, and personally assured me, that he considered I had conferred upon him the greatest possible honour by holding him in such high esteem. He accepted with pleasure. . . . His acquiescence was most gracious. I trusted him. . . . From the moment that he reappeared on the scene, Clarisse became freakish, disposed to unnatural moods, captious in the extreme. One time she would almost make up her mind to accompany me, in the next breath she would settle back in her desire to tarry where she was. Finally, she concluded the last day before I sailed, that the time would pass quickly if she had fresh diversions. She resolved, after my departure, to return to India, and once again renew her erratic study of *Theosophy*, a subject De La Rue had delved into with zealous fanaticism. . . . I was, I assure you, more than happy to perceive that she still possessed sufficient latent interest in any topic, whatsoever, to lift her out of her deplorable moods—moods which were making rapid invasion upon her former sunny temper, making her very morbid. . . . Dick, not

only did I sanction, but I strenuously urged her to pursue a course which, heaven help me, Dick, ultimately blasted our happiness! — cost her her life!" For a moment overwhelmed, he could not proceed. Gaining self-mastery, he resumed in a rapid, cold way, eager to have done with his recital.

"By a concatenation of circumstances, untoward, unavoidable, I was detained in America eighteen months, when I received this document, partially penned by Clarisse, and finished under a solemn pledge at her deathbed by an old Abbé. . . . She had returned alone to Switzerland."

Herbert Severance drew from the breast pocket of his coat, and handed to Dick, the square packet he had taken from his desk the previous day, and covering his face with his hands, said, "Dick, read it for yourself, but remember, Dick :

‘The heinous and spiteful act
Of Satan, done in Paradise,
. Was known
In Heaven.’”

Dick, all interest, perused in silence the much worn and tear-stained screeed written in French.

“HOTEL DU PONT,
“INTERLAKEN, SWITZERLAND, 186—.

“HERBERT, MY OWN WRONGED ONE,—Even now when guilt makes it impossible to continue my identity as your wife, my soul is steeped in rankling bitterness, and I cannot find words to express. If I could be true, be honest, and still keep your love, merit your idolatry, God knows, I should be freed from daily purgatory.

"Alas, alas, I no longer can look in your dear eyes without the unmistakable realisation of my own ignominy—of my own sin! Well-beloved, since my sinning, when I have spoken to you, my words have fallen harshly upon my own ears as a self-reproach, for they were but shallow guises to hide the *lie*—*the shameful lie* I live!

"Never, no never, never can I again kiss you, feeling as I do that my lips have been defiled by another.

"My beloved, the sweetness, and joy of love, have been ruthlessly dissipated, through my own moral weakness, through my insatiate fondness of flattery, through my love of power.

"Could there be a more pitiable retribution, than that, falling upon my wicked head? Think of it, think of it now, when I am ill unto death, now, when I yearn for your tender care, that the only reparation I can possibly make in any way for my wilful sinning, is to leave you! To renounce my wifehood! My God! think of it! think of it! Yes, leave you! yes, suffer a cruel retribution, deprived of all I have so wantonly forfeited—die—die—alone—abandoned to fate. Yet, I dare not pretend that I do not justly merit it all!

"Herbert, I must confess, that, actuated by the false advice of another, I averred the death of our little one. Herbert, for God's sake forgive me—*it was a lie!*"

"She still lives. Yes, lives above all future want, above struggle such as I have known. . . . Endowed with the bulk of my fortune, she is to be brought up in the belief that she is an orphan, under the supervision of the Lady Superior of a certain convent in France, but not to take the veil, nor be suaded to the religion.

"An Abbé, I have great faith in as a world-wise honest preceptor, counselled me to this course, knowing my error in life, as the only way to spare the innocent child from shame and sorrow.

"The deception has been perpetrated for so long a time, certain intricacies have gradually entwined themselves to clothe with difficulty its undoing whilst I live, if ever. Alas,

repentance does not bring back the wrong. There is no real absolution, none, none.

"Oh Herbert, Herbert, your generous, noble, trustful nature, allowing me utter freedom of action ; my foolish wayward vacillating character, so deluded, so charmed by the brilliancy of public *éclat*, public success, are conjointly at the bottom of my downfall. Like a moth I flew straight into the flame of self-destruction !

"Everything I cherished most has been blasted, cruelly crushed. . . . Stage frippery I thought, in my delusion, life's reality. . . . The singular psychological influences of sounds, sights, odours, and individuals, have ever, as you know, swayed me in an exaggerated, irresistible manner ; have drawn me with loadstone attraction. Often I've been reluctant, yet they were more forcible than my irresolute will, and enticed me into avenues full of dangers, which I divined were lurking for me.

"Oh, why are we poor mortals so blind, so stupidly heedless, till we stumble into a yawning pit we might have easily perceived, had we paused at the perilous crisis but one moment to reflect ? Why are we not gifted like the dumb brutes to scent the track of our enemies ?

"For instance, the marvellous mysticism of the Buddha adepts, you so inconsequently brought me to know, with all their strange unwritten doctrines, fascinated and enslaved me beyond resistance.

"I wrought myself up to the belief, that I, too, possessed a gift of transcendental powers. I grew to believe I had a divine right, to sacrifice everything to the higher development of those powers, and yet commit no sin to myself, or to another. Such bewilderment of doctrine, a doctrine all very well in itself ;—it taught me in very many ways a lofty up-reaching—but, you must know, another also professed to seek the same sublimated estate—a *devil incarnate* ! who only sought thereby to gain control over me, for my utter ruin ! Presently, this man became my guide, and I witlessly, whilst waiting for you, fell his too ready victim. . . .

"Herbert, I must tell you the story, I want you to know it all, to pity your lost one.

"Into his interpretation of the esoteric doctrine, he linked gross animalisms, foreign to the cult in its own purity; these, in my blind belief, never were repellant to me, nay, never so much as appeared either strange or of evil tendency. . . . By slow degrees arrived the time when complete surrender of my soul, of my body, was the last office requisite, according to this devil's teachings, for me to attain a crucial point whereby I should become as one elect, endowed with marvellous attributes of the most potent nature.

"For days I did not walk, I seemed to float in a mystic atmosphere through space, above the earth. I could not eat, I seemed to imbibe nourishment from some supernatural source. Nor could I sleep. . . . Whilst in a hysterical semi-religious organism, a species of abnormal ecstasy, I listened to this evil man's vile teachings which he so cleverly varnished with a film of truth! Listened! Heeded!

"So gradually and craftily had this false apostle enticed me, that I stood, so to speak, upon the very platform of virtue's guillotine, ready, eager to place my head upon the block, believing I was hedged about by some supernatural power, and remote from any mundane harm. . . . My moral sight was so obscured, he made me a convert to the belief that, yielding to his amorous proposals, was an act beyond my own volition, impelled, exacted by high spiritual dictates! . . .

"*My God! After the scales dropped from my eyes, I was ruined, defiled, for ever more, without the pale of retraction, —too late! too late! lost for ever!*

"Into my distraught ears he poured his honied poison; talked of Fate, recounted the story of the picture *Souvenir*; how the vision of my face had haunted him day and night ever since; how there had sprung up in his heart the desire to inspire in me an attachment, a love to match his passion; how he had regarded you with jealous frenzy; how he abided his time to avenge himself against all that had robbed him of me, *his fate, his destiny.*

"The favoured opportunity came for him when I made eager search for the philosophy of the *consecrated eternal*s, and in my desire for a comprehension of the duties required of

adepts. Once I became his victim, all my aspirations for the higher, better, sublimate life were sardonically scoffed by *this scorpion, this trickster*. He was earth-earthy.

"Despite his baseness, now known to me, there were times when his great welling, brown eyes became wine-coloured, then lurid like tiger's eyes; anon, when steadfastly fixed upon me, were imbued with an incomparable potency, drawing me like a loadstone across a room to sit beside him, regardless, oblivious to all appearances or to the comments evoked. He gloried in a public display of his domination over me with shameless flagrancy. It was so cruel, so cruel.

"Sometimes at night I have waked with a sudden start, like one out of a hideous dream, who feels himself hurled through endless space to certain destruction. Through the wavy uncertain half-light I have experienced an overpowering force, concentrated upon my brow between my eyes, like a magnet held there, and, by slow degrees, by an uninterpretable process, visions appeared so real, so distinct, I dared not deny their actuality. I was led to attribute this state to something more subtle even than clairvoyance, for then it was I knew his innermost thoughts, his most secret wish. He was the *positive*, I, alas! was the *sensitive*. But it was too profound for my intellect. *Ego, Karma, Astral Body*, and all the other states were too obscure for me to comprehend or solve. I believed blindly.

"After fearful conflicts, and mature decision on my part to pursue a course, alas! when he conspired to have it otherwise, I have helplessly changed as a weather-vane in a shifting wind.

"Now it is eternally at an end. Thank God, the estrangement is complete, he dare not approach me—never, never more!

"Occasionally, all his machinations in false occultisms failed to influence me, then he would call into play every artifice to enspell me. . . . The charm—a vague one I never could solve—of his voice usually affected me. The moment he sang some favourite strain, like one spell-bound I willingly acceded to his most unreasonable request. A thousand times

has he recalled 'The Song of Triumphant Love, twitting me with its partial verity in my case.

"Hours of recrimination came—hours when I berated him for the calamity his accursed acts wrought upon me. He always made ready answer to all my reproaches, to my regrets, to my threats that I should forthwith confess our mutual perfidy to you, and sue for mercy. According to him, by a course so mad I should make you, you, whom I loved so truly at heart, suffer without excusable reason. Thus he held me in check, *this wretch*, because he possessed an intense magnetic power over me. It was strange—it was strange.

"Like one overwhelmed by the phantoms of an incubus, I have struggled desperately in vain to free myself. I found ample apology for all my acts so long as a Platonic relationship only existed, but from the moment that I was misled into a criminal association, and became his victim, from the moment the continual necessity for deception and subterfuge sprang up, I felt my reason was being dethroned. I could not endure the constant shamefaced lies I was thereafter driven to enact, to utter, in trying to hide my guilt. I seemed eternally possessed by evil spirits bent upon sinking me hopelessly beyond redemption. I tried to solve the appalling power—I tried to know why I could one time have my heart replete with contentment and joy in your presence, and feel I could not exist out of your sight, and yet another time be led like an unthinking child in an opposite direction by *that devil*. Compromise myself—dishonour your name!—my thoughts were plunged in mazy speculations. I was unsettled. Fate! fate! planned, with sinister intent, an evil destiny for me.

"Oh, Herbert! Herbert! when you have caressed me, called me pure, beautiful, and noble, my heart has risen in my throat ready to break. Countless times I have almost emerged from the blackness of my deception—have been tempted to tear off the hideous, suffocating mask, and disclose all, all, the very worst to you! Startled in contemplating the enormity of my sin, as I would seek language to divulge

it to you, cowardice, pride, shame have united to hinder me. So is it, I have continued to smile falsely while you were heaping coals of fire upon my guilty head, by your loving expressions of adoration.

"I have prayed imploringly for strength to avert the overruling weakness of my nature. Do not think I did not resent and rebel with spirit against the odious tyranny this wretched man swayed over me. The conflict was ceaseless. Strange, too, although I was so wantonly trampling upon your confidence, upon your honour, upon your love, the mere thought of giving you up for another, or that you might repudiate me, always agitated me with jealous fury! . . . I have tried—God knows I have—to stay this disaster, but all to no avail. I was in a toil! I could not extricate myself! I dare not implore your help! . . .

"That unfortunate night at the Palace of the Tuileries planted in my breast the tare that I have since reaped. . . . Vanity, it was my curse.

"Alas, alas! we blind mortals know not the danger overshadowing our paths, until the blow, a shock like a thunderbolt out of a clear, serene sky, shatters our ideal selves! I was, indeed, but a cockle shell floating on the crest of every bounding wave, to be crushed on some unseen rock mid-ocean.

"Not knowing much of the variances in individual characters, having no real experience, I found myself led on the quicksands of curiosity, tormented by all sorts of morbid thoughts. Constantly, like a whisper from another self came the thoughts, do other persons feel as I do? Is the love bestowed upon me by one heart an accident? Would other hearts beat as fervently and as devotedly for me, and mine for others, if circumstances had by chance been different?

"My stability was awry. I knew not my own disposition, nor my own tendencies. Every phase of life and character contemplated by me for the first time was enigmatical. . . . This fact appeared to muffle my conscience. . . . Each day developed some trait in myself heretofore unknown. I was at worst only a natural creature actuated by elements and

surroundings in no sense phenomenal. . . . Spring, summer, autumn, and winter resided within my being. Although at wide variance one with the other, each season was true to itself, and, as a totality, I cannot, try as I may, even now but believe that they all harmonised in accordance with certain inscrutable laws of nature. Alas, if I could have known how to govern myself, all my present misery might have been spared!

"Constantly craving excitement, diversion, change of scene, change of companionship, change of thought, I fretted under the humdrum of seven days alike. What was deficient in myself I instinctively reached out for, and often found in others. Different people affected me differently. Some, as excitants, intoxicated me until I reached a delirium of enthusiasm, when I could surpass my greatest attainments; others, as depressants, hung about me like millstones, and weighted the hour with hopeless despair; then it was, all melody and song would be over-sounded by a dirgeful miserecordia! Again, others were antagonists, every overture chafed and repulsed me; and again, others, as affinities, tallied my every thought and every emotion; and yet, again, others, as vapid indifferents, could in no way stir me to like or dislike, so utterly *nil* were they to me.

"You remember that the French savants used to call me a sensitive. And so at times I was, for I could *sense* and feel the thoughts and feelings of those with whom I came in contact, to such an extent I have often found every fibre in my body became tremulous. I have hotly flushed crimson over an inner consciousness of their thoughts, as though I was a party to their inception.

"Oh, my dear Herbert, I am confessing all this to you,—you, well-beloved, who are so magnanimous and just above all things,—confessing my faults, my sins, to you in the hope that you, whom I have so injured and defrauded, may judge my shortcomings with clemency, and will find deep down in your heart some slight excuse for me.

"Had you only taken me at once to America after I renounced the opera, and kept me in ignorance of the weird,

occult theories, you were cool-headed enough to investigate without prejudice to yourself, but, alas, which I could not fathom nor resist, and became engulfed in; had you, after our marriage, strenuously urged me at any cost to refuse the tempting offers of sycophants, who allured me to continue in my profession; had you kept me away from the seductive influences of my old life, perhaps, in spite of all, perhaps, the good that was in me might have prevailed.

“*My explicit command is that la petite Clarisse shall never enter a professional career, never, never! . . . I should rise out of my grave as a Nemesis, to haunt anyone who should so far betray my dying behest as to countenance or assist her to a public career, notwithstanding she may be endowed with unparalleled gifts. . . . The life is too hazardous. . . . The association false, pernicious. . . . Ruinous. . . . I pray God that the fortune I leave her may not carry a stigma with it to overshadow her life with a curse!*

“Herbert! Herbert! forgive me. Forget your unhappy one's errors. Try to make new relations in life to compensate for all out of which I have so wickedly wronged you. I swear I did not know the enormity of my acts until too late.

“Should you live until, and should Clarisse live to reach her eighteenth year, she will be taken to you in America. Guide, cherish, protect our child. Let not the blight of my wrong-doings touch her. I pray that she may come to you *a pearl* without a flaw.

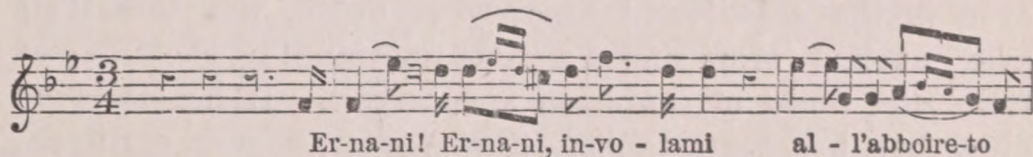
“Feeling, as I do, unworthy of this child, who is as a God-sent blessing,—unwilling to live and be deprived of her innocent companionship, denied her filial, reverential love,—I aver I feel no sorrow in facing grim death. Death, which once I would have been mad with fright to contemplate, is now acceptable—if you will forgive me! I implore it, with the ice upon my breath. *Herbert, forgive me, let not damnation* black my sepulchre!

“I shall not live to know from your own lips, nor to receive your written assurance. No, I cannot, I cannot! nevertheless something tells me that you will not refuse my last request, hence it is that death will be glorified by the

greatest earthly blessing. . . . My God! the thought kills me with unspeakable rapture! Forgiven! Forgiven! . . .

"I trust you may have no solicitude for my material welfare. Every possible care and comfort have been mine. . . . All ministrations have been to no purpose. The fatal poison of wrong-doing knows no cure. . . . The physician, in answer to my questions, after I told him *I must know unequivocally the truth*, for I must write most important papers, said plainly that I had no time to lose. . . . I rejoice withal that the end is nigh. . . . Certain papers, officially executed, will be sent to you. . . . One word, well-beloved, for I am going. . . . I entreat you to ignore the existence of him who has so defrauded you. . . .

"The air is filled with swelling voices—list!—the anthems of the wind—the light—the night—moaning dirges—

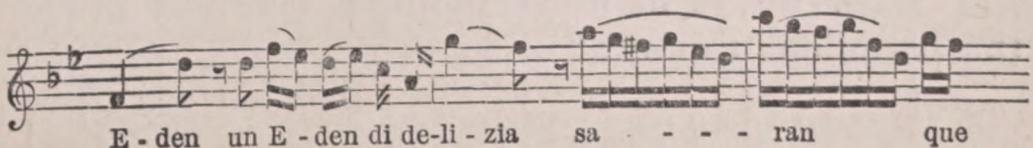


"All—all—reflecting the eternal spaces.



"Hark! bark! there comes a joyous jubilant burst of chorus. . . . What rapture! see! see! the flowers swayed by the gentle breezes seem to have a magic thrill . . . a music in their very perfume! Oh! how beautiful—the light—the dawn of eternity comes stranded through the blinds, in slender rays, like golden harp strings. . . .

"I am rocked in a supernal rhapsody. . . . Oh God! Oh God! how I have gone astray! Hadst Thou no pity? Oh! misery! misery! . . . Why didst Thou not save me? What right had I to sin? . . . Hark! the music comes—the spheres roll on in majesty of sound.



"Yes, yes, the poor neophyte remembers the joys, the joys he fore-swore, when he took the vows . . . his life—one chagrin. . . . Go! go! you are wicked, designing—leave me! leave me! . . . Help! help! help! . . . See him! Look! look! . . . There! there!" . . . See his eyes are cups of ruby poison. . . . Thanks, Herbert; thanks, beloved. I knew you would succour me from that devouring vampire. . . . Oh, oh! the *lie* kills me . . . *the lie* . . . No, no, no! never sing. . . . Laurels are silver thorns—they crucify. . . . Take me away! Take me away! the applause frightens me! Succour! succour! Yes, yes, I know it, I know it; who breaks pays—the penalty—the penalty for my sin is my life—my l-i-f-e—life—li——"

"Life's frail tenure finally snapped. More beautiful than ever, in the enhalloved sanctity of death, was this truly penitent one. More sinned against than sinning, she departed from this world of confusion and sorrow. If hearts break ever, then her heart broke. She was forgiven on earth, she must have been forgiven in heaven.

"ABBÉ CHRISTOPHER."

"Sworn to before the American Consul, Interlaken, Switzerland, 186—, as the last words of Clarisse Arditte Severance, who died of fever, etc., etc."

"Witnessed by

"H W
"T S"

Seal.

When Dick finished perusing the document, he looked up at his uncle, much moved, and said:

"Well, uncle, in what manner did you punish the perfidious Count?"

"Ah, Dick, the old foolish method. Sought him out, fought a duel, both of us badly scratched, seconds satisfied. We parted presumably to lose sight of each other for ever. . . . I looked carefully into my wife's death, traced our child's retreat to France, and concluded, at all sacrifices to my feelings, to follow out as nearly as possible the mother's wishes; returned to America a sadder but a wiser man; centred all my hopes upon you, my boy, and upon my daughter should she live. Dick, now you understand something of the magnitude of my horror and my vexation when you announced coolly your interest in a gifted vocalist. *I detest the profession. It is perdition to most of its votaries.* . . . Then, too, Dick, my daughter has come to America. She will be established here with me in her own home this very week. You can well comprehend how your avowal that you knew the daughter of the model of the picture *Souvenir* startled me. Dick, what does it mean?"

"What does it mean? My dear uncle, I'll tell you exactly what it means. The young girl I'm interested in, the young lovely pure girl forsooth I'm madly in love with, I now know veritably *is your daughter.*"

"But, Dick, the marvellous voice, what of that? And the critic's opinion?"

"That, in the main, goes for nothing. Have no fears, uncle." They embraced one another with intense fervour, overcome by the climax which

had so happily terminated all reason for harsh rebuke or resentment on either side.

"Dick, I'm overjoyed! This pays me back trebly for every jot of unhappiness bred of my misgivings."

"Uncle, I've not dared openly to declare my love to Clarisse, but I dare believe it is tacitly taken for granted. Have I insured the guardian's consent?"

"Consent! Yes, a thousand times. I am impatient to settle the unexpected, and make quite sure I'm not deluded. Clarisse shall come home this very day, Dick, if you are well enough to absent yourself for a while. I must turn you out bag and baggage. We must refrain from shocking her sensitive nature, and we must not subject her rudely to a violent surprise. The cat, Master Dick, must come out of the bag in good order." Herbert Severance was rubbing his hands with delight, and a trifle prone to drop into platitudes. However, Dick's joy asserted itself, and drowned his uncle in the ascendancy for audience.

"Good and gracious God, how can I ever be thankful enough to the fate awarding me such a heavenly blessing? The thought seems to mock me with some delusion. It is too ecstatic to believe! Uncle, let me henceforth aid you to bury in oblivion all past sorrows, all past apprehensions concerning Clarisse and your humble servant. If Clarisse should reciprocate my love, we will try to make you *as happy as ourselves*." There

was something truly very fine in this touch of nature.

Dick was undergoing a transformation in his condition, forgetting his recent illness. He was yielding to a species of mind-cure too subtle to be scoffed at or resisted.

Before many hours elapsed, with the doctor's sanction, Dick departed. Herbert Severance lost no time in sending word to Clarisse, that if consonant with her pleasure, he would send the carriage for herself and friend towards evening.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE UNEXPECTED.

“Heaven sometimes hedges a rare character about with ungainliness and odium, as the burr that protects the fruit.”

HERBERT SEVERANCE'S retrospection, following as the reflex of his conversation with Dick, was far from comforting or agreeable. Had he not, after all, witlessly played the *rôle* of shirk and coward? No denying that he had permitted all these years to roll around without evincing proper paternal interest in his daughter,—that is to say, personal interest. As a stickler for duty, how could he ever evade the verdict, that, all things considered, it was his prime duty to have at least personally acquainted himself, not delegated his duty to agents. He alone should have settled upon the manner of her instruction, and selected the tutors who were to educate her. He should have known who were her associates, what her surroundings. After all, he might have ascertained with little trouble all these points. How blind he had been.

To be sure, he educed one meagre grain of consolation from the fact that he had kept inviolable

his wife's dying behest. Ah! but then from a rational standpoint, should such a dying request be held fast to? On its very face the answer could be but negative. Had it not been written during fevered delirium, previous to dissolution? She was avowedly conscious that death was fast taking place, she must have acted under an excitable stress, which heeded not the full sense of the impracticable covenants she was exacting; therefore, was it not clearly the act of a man of common sense, in the unperturbed enjoyment of reason, to disregard the letter of the charge, when not in accordance with the exigencies of life's more insistent demands for the living?

After all, had he not owed to the living, to his daughter, a duty paramount to the foolish, sentimental, half-superstitious reverence that had prompted adherence to the wishes of the dead,—the dead, who could have taken no cognizance of the mundane things yet to come? His wife, there was no denying, had been in death's grip; she was at the time swayed by personalities, and incited by an exaggerated distortion of bitter events flitting through her brain.

"Ah," murmured he, "Emerson is correct, 'The way to mend the bad world is to create the right world.'"

This he resolved to do as best he could, by way of atonement.

He quailed to think that he might, in his retrieval, possibly be compelled to make ac-

knowledgments to Clarisse, this young mettlesome girl, that obviously were not creditable to his own manliness. . . . Happy thought! Why, then, should he reveal such dubious acts, which had long since outstripped the past, which had offered the conditions upon which he had predicated his right to act?

Alack, alack! seen through the dim vista of the by-gone, despite the dint of all his reasoning, he himself could not now to-day find warrantable apology for his course. He had sinned. This remorse was retributive.

One thing he resolved, to refrain from repining. He would consult Dick as to the feasibility or strict necessity of enlightening Clarisse as to her parentage, or other complicated points, at least during his own life. His moral cowardice made him flinch. He cast about like a very weakling for a foothold, excused his present want of backbone in thinking it but proper to shuffle off from his own shoulders upon Dick's, future responsibility.

"In all probability Dick will be, and soon, Clarisse's husband, therefore it is but fair to consult him—and without loss of dignity to myself—on a matter that virtually will concern the young couple far more than it does myself."

How he shambled. This moral problem teased him with greater perplexity than any legal case he had advocated or been pitted against during his seventeen years' practice at the bar. Finally, as a rally to himself, he exclaimed half aloud:

“Well, well, man, why borrow trouble? Once Clarisse is habilitated, with all her personal rights, in her home,—which from the outset she shall be made to understand is hers beyond dispute,—then I may perceive a fair open way to square the angularities which now obtrude on all sides.” His words however did not tally with his mood.

In spite of his reasoning, the old sorrow was vividly underlying his present thoughts. Anew the old wound seemed to be freshly torn open, bleeding and paining as of yore. An avenging conscience was prodding his heart. De La Rue, the perfidious scoundrel who had pirated his happiness, was the sole mark for his deep-rooted ire. His lips compressed, with resentment he struck his desk with clenched fists.

“*Yes, as there is a God in heaven, I swear, if the venomous reptile still lives, I shall essay his life.*” After this ejaculation he lapsed into an ominous silence, eyes bent upon space, following the provoked thoughts.

Yes, day and night until death he vowed to himself, if needs be, to ransack the universe for this wretched desecrator. He must, he should have substantial revenge. He had been too long quiescent, but now the time had come when his honour, his dead wife’s wrongs must be avenged. Aye, did not his daughter’s future demand such at his hands? The Mosaic Law was good. Besides, De La Rue could only be regarded in the light of a wild beast; he deserved to be hunted down with a pack of bloodhounds.

So was it that the embers which smouldered all these years had been fanned into a raging fire by the recent recital he had made to Dick, and heightened by his subsequent contemplation. Resolving to be a law unto himself, his thoughts took another turn. He mused, profoundly wrapt.

What could Dick have meant concerning the marvellous voice of the young girl he professed interest for? Misery of miseries! was it not likely that his daughter had inherited her mother's fatal gift? The thought agitated him vastly. Suppose, as a hateful hypothesis upon which to base a new horror, that the girl was bent on following her inborn proclivities, and such led her to the stage, of what avail could he dare hope his interference would be to check her? If a passion with her, feminine obstinacy might tend to baffle his best intentions toward the promotion of her welfare, for he had no established claim upon her obedience. All these ideas eddied around in his disquieted brain to a focal point.

Nothing could he settle until he saw Dick. An explanation was yet due him from his nephew relative to the honest stand he had assumed, and which led up to and eventuated his laying bare the long buried sorrows of his own life.

He felt almost betrayed. His speculations were not to be downed, or bade to wait tranquilly; they would fluctuate from this to that uncertainty. The black shuttle kept flying across the woof of thought.

Truly, Dick had admitted the identity of the

girl he was enamoured of as one with his own daughter ; and yet all was veiled in by a general mystification that must be dispelled, cost what it might. Developments in this case could not be rushed to a conclusion by a personally instituted referee. Wait he must, it was so difficult, yet imperative.

Practical man that he indisputably was in his everyday round of life, he had entertained misgivings lest servants' vague gossip might reach Clarisse's ears, and set her to ponder on topics he had rather she knew nothing whatever about ; therefore he had prudently installed new servants before she should arrive, from the housekeeper to the scullery-maid. There was but one exception to the clean sweep, which he made in favour of his own body-servant, Jones, who had been in his service ever since he kept house ; a discreet, faithful servant not easily replaced, and thoroughly above the tattle of the servants' hall.

"Jones is my factotum ; without him my household heretofore would have been as a brick without straw, a wheel without tire ; everything would have wee-wawed out of time and tune and place," were the introductory words he bestowed upon Jones, when he was informing Clarisse of the qualifications of the corps of servants at her command, finishing up his remarks with "A superior servant, my child, who will prove a useful adjunct as major-domo to you, as you must be an inexperienced chatelain."

When Herbert Severance's carriage drove up Washington Square to Mrs Bleecker's residence, Clarisse heard the rumbling of the bowling wheels, and the ringing cadence of the high-stepping horses' hoofs as they came dashing with speed, noisily over the cobble stones ; it was music to her ears more entrancing than any she had ever listened to before. She was going home. She should so soon realise her dream, and know all about her parents. She could receive Dick openly as a suitor, if her guardian only approved.

In an undertone to herself she said : " Of course he must approve, for how could the most punctilious person living find a single flaw in Dick's character, or even his appearance, to disapprove ? " She shook her head, and smiled incredulously. " It was impossible." With rejoicing she broke out afresh : " To-night, to-night, not later, I'll ask my guardian's consent to invite Mr Drysdale to call. Doubtless he will enquire who Dick is ? *Mon Dieu*, what answer can I make ? After all, who is Dick ? . . . My love ! my fate ! my all ! How can I plumply tell my guardian this ? He will deem me a simpleton ! "

Time was up. She must go. She cast a hasty glance about the sweet, dainty room she had occupied so many happy weeks. An expression of regret clouded her face. She turned to the little dressing table, and touching her lips to her own reflection in the mirror in a charming manner, said impulsively :

“Good-bye, Clarisse, good-bye!” She waved her pocket handkerchief as she crossed the threshold. “Good-bye, dear little room, good-bye! *Souviens-moi!*”

She had been very happy with Mrs Bleeker. Nothing, she felt sure, could ever wean her from the first motherly love she had ever known.

Both she and Edith were truly touched to part from the little lady for whom they had grown to have such a sterling attachment. As they descended the street steps to the carriage, Mrs Bleeker stood at the top, her eyes glistening with ready tears, and in a tremulous voice said:

“Remember, girls, if ever you need an old lady friend, call on me.” She buried her face in her pocket handkerchief. “Dear, oh dear, what a void your departure will make in the home. I declare I’m half a mind to break up housekeeping.”

When the footman touched his hat to Clarisse, according to the regulated sign-manual of a well-bred lackey, she was overtaken by a sense of proprietorship, and stepped aside to allow Edith, her future guest, to pass before and enter the carriage—her carriage—first. Edith could not repress a smile as she observed the movement, and instinctively divined the worldly paltriness that instigated Clarisse, guileless Clarisse, to this involuntary assumption of her invested rights.

True to nature, Clarisse, without being taught, had, when the time arrived, doffed her pinafore to don the mantle becoming her importance as an

affluent householder. She was no richer to-day than heretofore, yet the inner consciousness that she was now henceforth the recognised mistress of a pretentious establishment, effected this obvious difference in her demeanour. As they rode along in silence, Edith's cogitations led her into a philosophical strain. After all, Clarisse was only illustrating cause and effect. The act she had been guilty of was neither personal nor independent. It was not arbitrary.

“ ‘Of all the drums and rattles by which men are made willing to have their heads broke, and are led out solemnly every morning to parade, the most admirable is this by which we are brought to believe events are arbitrary and independent of actions!’ ” a tit-bit of wisdom she recalled at this moment without being able to hit upon the author.

Clarisse looked like a big doll-baby playing mother-doll, as she posed in the corner of the sumptuously cushioned seat, her tozzle of flossy blond hair escaping from her hat, in contrast against the blue velvet. She was a feast for artist eye. The carriage stopped. Herbert Severance greeted the occupants with expressions of unalloyed delight as he assisted them to alight, and ushered them into the house with much flourish.

The servants were all smartly capped and aproned, standing in line on either side of the hallway, bowing and scraping in such a comical manner as they eyed their future mistress, to gauge

her temper and formulate "her sort" according to their notions.

At heart, and in all domestic experience, Clarisse was a mere child, and felt embarrassed beyond power of concealment in the presence of this formidable array of expert servitors, who were henceforth obeisantly to follow her beck and call, or break out in open rebellion, and give her quick "*notice*" because "*she be only a young thing*" and "*som'it o' a mullet-head.*"

Graciously she nodded to one and all, as she ran the gauntlet, leaning on her guardian's arm. He addressed them:—

"This, my good people, is your mistress, Miss Clarisse. Do not fail to do your best to serve and please her, and all will go well."

Here ensued a ducking of heads, a scuffling of feet, a rapid doubling of bodies, like jack-knives snapped open and shut, and butter-tub curtsies, as males and females made their respectful salutations to the young mistress. No sooner over than the dapper housekeeper, as one in authority, signed the flock their dismissal, herself tarrying to receive explicit orders, and wait upon the ladies.

These insignificant matters of everyday life, which betokened to Clarisse the fact that henceforth she had cares and responsibilities to discharge in her present attitude of mistress, oppressed her. She felt like a pinioned bird, with longings to soar forthwith above and beyond all mundane trammels.

The spacious house, its sumptuous appointments,

bespeaking wealth, luxury, artistic taste, and unmistakable *largesse*, gave her a sickening twinge of nostalgia. Truly she was not yet at home. The maiden was a stranger to her new *rôle* of mistress.

At the foot of the main staircase, hiding the newel posts, two bronze armoured torch-bearers seemingly stood ready to charge upon her with deadly ferocity for her intrusion. The dusky half-light pervading the lofty halls—for the daylight but timidly and sparsely entered through the stained-glass window-panes—imparted a religious hush and air, reminding her of the secluded cloisters of the convent, so familiar to her childhood; she would not have been surprised to see a nun or an abbe silently emerge from any corner.

Edith, true to her vocation, had been from the moment of their entrance revolving in her brain the best methods to reliven the reigning solemnity, and furbish up a bit the over-awing conventionality of wainscotting and dado, frieze and ceiling; how to effectively pierce the regulated gloom, by throwing thereabout a dash of warm colour, and admit more than sombre reverberations of the cheery sunshine. "A fine noble tomb! A lugubrious dwelling! Ugh! it's enough to give one the shivers, and goose-flesh one from head to foot. According to appearances it should be haunted," she instinctively said to herself, winding up with, "Out upon it all! It's false to art! Meritricious, from A to Z!" She had no sympathy nor tolerance for cumbersome, depressing, decorative fads; in fact, she could but

regard them as the direct reverse of the highest artistic taste.

So much for first impressions. No sooner had they passed out of the halls within the rooms, than the wholly different aspect of the interior presented a vivid contrast for the better. There was undoubtedly a certain stiffness in the arrangement of the furniture, due to the lack of ease on the part of new servants ; but, all in all, there was but little to be criticised, or that grated on the best of good taste. Nothing was actually inharmonious, or, at least, that a trifling touch by the right fingers might not remedy and soften at once.

At the dinner-table Herbert Severance's countenance was illumined with a radiant smile of contentment and joy. He said several times, in different phraseology, *à propos* of nothing :

"Ah, I shall indeed believe myself in paradise, with you two charming sprites as my daily trencher companions. . . . Life will certainly be fraught with new joys, new aims for me, with the glorious inspiration you will lend to its routine. . . . I trust you may both be happy, and will find sufficient diversion to ward off regrets or the blues. . . . Surround yourselves with the companions of whom you are already fond, and enlarge your circle." Dropping his generalisation, he turned towards Clarisse, addressed her : "My dear child, in a short time I purpose giving a reception, at which you shall make your *début* in my world. With due formality I shall proudly present you to all my friends."

Clarisse clapped her hands, exclaiming, "How charming! how charming." However, his remarks suggested to her that it would be an excellent moment to acquit herself of what was uppermost in her thoughts.

"Mr Severance," she ventured hesitatingly.

He looked at her with astonished eyes, and interrupted her.

"No, not *Mr Severance*, but hereafter and always, *father*."

"Well, then, *father*—how droll!" resumed she, her face dyed crimson by the fear that she was to have received a reprimand of a different sort, when he had checked her, "*father*, while in Europe Baron de Sillvermann presented to us a party of young American gentlemen." She kept eyeing him as she proceeded. "We have continued," she interjected, "with Mrs Bleecker's sanction, since coming to America, their acquaintance, with one exception, and if you do not disapprove, I think it would be very pleasant to invite them to my home. Don't you, Edith?"

"Yes, most certainly, Clarisse. But what a silly question to ask me. You know I am a staunch votary of steadfastness. Once a friend, always a friend, is one of my mottoes."

"My child," spoke up Mr Severance, his face beaming, "you are chatelain of the manor; no one shall gainsay you or your friend's slightest wish, unless it portends some harm to you singly or jointly; then—well then, I should *advise you, not*

dictate." The emphasis placed upon this utterance betrayed considerable feeling. Did he dimly see in the future occasions for antagonisms? God, not mortals, knows the promptings of such thoughts.

"Among the number, *father*,—how droll to call any person father *out of orders*,—well, father, there was a Mr Drysdale—"

"Oh, Clarisse! Clarisse! my child, do you know what you are saying?" The words fairly burst from his lips. He abruptly sprang from the table, rushed behind her chair, and kissed her fervently on the forehead.

Surprised and disconcerted, she looked up in his face appealingly. Her lips quivered.

"I did not mean to be unreasonable," she said, apologetically. "Is there any cause why I may not invite him?"

"No, no, my child! you have *carte blanche* to invite *him*, and, I reiterate, any of your friends. This is unqualifiedly your home. Whomsoever enters here must be here by your invitation or wish, else they shall leave at your bidding. Can I say more?"—he faltered a moment—"unless, perchance, I add the clause that I, too, have no right of continuance when you weary of my presence." This gust of emotion had started great beads of perspiration on his forehead.

Edith had quietly observed this scene. She mentally put a pin into the little melodrama, as something unusual to note. Aha! thought she, this self-poised, dignified, strong man is not of the

weather-vane sort to be thus agitated by a slight incident, or one to yield his self-possession to any ordinary coincident,—an enigma, interesting to her fertile brain, because of its complexity, requiring skill to riddle. Time would tell. She was casually studying values from life.

Clarisse affected a scowl at her guardian's words, shrugged her shoulders, making Mr Severance and Edith laugh outright, as she poutingly retorted :

“You are impolite and unkind to hint that I could be such an ungrateful toad !”

Leaving the dining-room, both girls of one accord requested permission, which was granted, to accompany Mr Severance to his library while he smoked.

The picture *Souvenir* had been purposely removed. In its place hung a choice gem from the brush of Alma Tadema. As he explained, in answer to a question put to him by Edith :

“This is an acquisition to my art collection I doubly value : firstly, for its intrinsic merit, *ça va sans dire* ; secondly, as a gift from a friend it was once in my power to save from ruin when he was in disastrous financial straits. This friend has never ceased to manifest his gratefulness for the needed prop at the needed time, even though he has amassed an enormous fortune. He has never wearied of his old obligation. You know, Miss Longstreth, that gratitude is an old-fashioned virtue fallen much in disuse now-a-days.”

Edith and Mr Severance thus drifted into con-

versation uninteresting to Clarisse. She meandered all about the room, attracted by various objects, until, finally tired of the monotony, she gazed out of the window. Finding it bright and alluring without, she stepped on to the balcony, and thence tripped into the garden. She was soon lost to view, as she glided between the bushes plucking flowers.

Suddenly an unearthly scream rent the air. Clarisse came dashing back like one pursued by a monster, her face blanched with terror. The entire household was in alarm. Edith and Mr Severance rushed to her aid, barely to catch her as she pitched forward at the foot of the steps, trembling so violently she was unable either to speak or to maintain herself in an upright position.

To the rapid questions asked by Mr Severance, she kept pointing nervously to the dense shrubbery, her eyes riveted upon the spot from whence she had just emerged.

Mr Severance committed her to Edith's care, and himself rushed in the direction she indicated by her gestures and fixed looks, followed by the wonder-stricken servants. He discovered a little gate, that had been for years cemented in the solid masonry as a fixture, prized open. Fresh foot-tracks on the gravelled pathway, as well as the evidences of a hasty exit upon the down-trodden foliage, clearly showed to him that some person had but just made an escape. He stepped out through the opening to the street, hastily glancing in all directions, but seeing no one he despatched the servants to make

a thorough search in the immediate vicinity, at the same time charging them to ask any passers-by if they had met anyone in flight. A police officer was summoned to patrol the neighbourhood. Every precaution was speedily taken to obviate another similar surprise.

Finally, Clarisse recovered her self-possession enough to tell the cause of her fright.

"I went humming along the parterre plucking flowers, thinking how beautiful it all was, and thankful that heaven had smiled thus upon me. I thought I heard a bird twitter, a bird in distress. I turned to the spot I fancied the sound came from, but the farther I walked beneath the interlacing shrubbery, the farther the bird's cries went from me. Full of pity for the poor bird I now fancied must be the prey of a cat or dog, and was being carried away, I started and ran in pursuit, always guided by the twittering, until I reached a spot where I saw the street-light streaming through an opening in the wall. Here it was some one touched me gently on my shoulder, and a voice I knew so well said, '*Remember, I am always near you for your mother's sake.*' Shaking with fear, I screamed, and turned around. *Mon Dieu !* I beheld Count De La Rue's double disappear through the hole in the wall !"

Herbert Severance, with horror depicted upon his face, sprang towards Clarisse in a perfect frenzy before she had finished. "In the name of God, child," he fairly yelled, "where did you know Count De La Rue ?"

"*Misericorde Dieu!* he was my tutor at the convent, but I saw his double! I saw his double! he must be dead!" hysterically responded Clarisse as she crouched close beside Edith.

Mr Severance, as one paralysed, stood speechless in his amazement. Edith coolly said in an effort to relieve the stress of the situation:

"Don't you think, Mr Severance, that Clarisse's superacute imagination will account for this episode? You must take into consideration the fact that she has been taxed to an abnormal degree by the general metamorphosis in her life, and is in a pardonable state of nervous excitability. Possibly a tramp sneaking about for pelf was surprised by her presence, and dreading his own exposure, scared her to cover his own flight, and in the confusion took to his heels and vanished through the wall. This is about the substance of the double, *n'est ce pas macheri?*" She stroked Clarisse's head. "You were humming some air, Clarisse, in all probability taught to you by Count De La Rue?"

"Oh, yes! I was, Edith."

"And thinking of your mother, eh?"

"Yes, oh yes."

"See, Mr Severance, I do not require a divining-rod. Nerves and imagination are too often the only sources from which loom up miraculous things."

"Quite right, Miss Longstreth, and very philosophical. The old story, revised, of the small piece of cheese, from which sprang a dynasty of giants to belabour the late diner in his sleep." Although he

was ill at ease he adored Edith for this anti-climax, for he had been personally thrown so utterly off guard as to have heedlessly plunged straight into great peril.

“Edith!” spasmodically burst out Clarisse, kissing her friend warmly, “You are truly my guardian angel, my good mentor. I confess I am nervous and excitable to-night. Can you blame me? Who wouldn’t be, in my place?”

“Let us go indoors,” calm now to outward appearances, urged Mr Severance in a subdued resolute tone.

CHAPTER XVII.

ACCURSED VOWS:

“A noble tempter dost thou show in this ;
And great affections wrestling in thy bosom
Doth make an earthquake of nobility ;
O, what a noble combat hast thou fought
Between compulsion and a brave respect !”

“I REGRET the necessity,” Mr Severance said once the two were again within doors, “which obliges me to commit you both to your own devices for amusement the remainder of the evening. Unfortunately, I have some important legal documents to examine.”

Clarisse turned towards him, her countenance somewhat downcast, and taking his hand, carried it to her lips, half whispered :

“Pardon me for giving you such a start. May I come to you later on when you have finished with your business ?”

“I feel loath, my child, to keep you from your rest so late, for I cannot count on concluding my business till after midnight.”

“Well, for to-night, then, only for to-night, I will be content without you.” She clung a moment to

him. He placed his hand under her chin, and upturned her face to implant a good-night kiss.

Edith, seeing this tender act, quietly left the room, making a silent inclination of her head to Mr Severance.

Finding himself alone with Clarisse, he could no longer repress his feelings.

"Clarisse, my own child, come, sit down awhile with me. I will postpone my work.

He sat down in his writing-chair, after placing her in a cosy seat.

"Clarisse, I do not wish to shock you, or seem austere, nevertheless I must ward against harm by exacting from you a solemn promise—in brief, that under no circumstances which may perchance arise, will you ever see or communicate with Count De La Rue." She recoiled, and looked vexed; yet he continued with emphasis, "*I have indisputable evidence of his personal depravity and unscrupulous wickedness.*" . . .

"Oh! no! no! do not say that, pray, do not say that!" She pressed the palms of her hands frantically to her ears. "He is so good, so kind, so noble. He has been my best, my only friend;" then in a broken, sobbing voice, "He, yes, he it was who taught me to devotedly worship the very name of my sainted mother. No! no! he cannot, he cannot be what you say!"

She was now standing, wringing her hands in her anguish, her voice tearful, but her eyes unmoistened. She kept shrinking away from her

father, as though repelled by his denunciation of her friend, lest he might contaminate her by his malignity.

Her wrath was at a white heat. Now he thought the time to strike the crucial blow—a blow which in dealing he risked shattering his own future happiness.

“My child,” he resumed, “this is a great misfortune to me, and a hardship for you, I perceive, that passeth all words; yet I must tell you, my child, that Count De La Rue is *an unmitigated villain*.” At these words she started. “He has sought to win your affection, bent on your ruin. I do not wish to be too harsh by my plainness, nor to wound your sense of loyalty for a supposed friend, but I must absolutely exact this promise from you *now*.” He had spoken with unshakeable authority.

“Mr Severance, I *absolutely* refuse to admit your right to exact compliance from me!” Her eyes fairly snapped in scornful anger, as she nervously kept clasping and unclasping her hands, standing defiantly, her head thrown well back, her breath coming quick and hot. “*Mr. Severance, who then are you?*” she demanded.

“Judgment of a righteous God, that my own daughter, my own flesh and blood, should challenge my paternal rights in this way!” He rose and stepped beside her, firmly clasping her in his arms, in spite of her fierce though futile struggle, drew her close to his breast, and looked steadfastly in her eyes, now burning with tears.

"Clarisse, my darling," he said in a pained voice, "I AM YOUR FATHER. YOU ARE MY OWN DAUGHTER!" Hot tears gushed from her eyes. "It has been in sacred fulfilment of your mother's dying behest, that I have not revealed my relationship before. Remorse and sorrow, of the most poignant kind, have dwelt with me all these long, bitter, lonely years of silent exile from you, *my own, my darling*. I can tell you no more, than that Count De La Rue was the actual cause of your cherished mother's untimely death."

"*Did he murder her?*" she fairly screamed the words.

"No, not in a violent way. But he killed her in a heartless way."

"Then, why have you not avenged her? Why, if your words are not mockeries, did you not *kill him*, or hand him over to the law? If he has truly robbed me of my mother,—how hard, how cruel to think of it,—then *I shall be her avenger!*" She had struggled free from his arms, the words leapt from her lips with the crazed vehemence of one suddenly stung to madness by an unseen viper. She stood there superb in her wrath, resembling an avenging angel, menacing her father in her upbraidings.

"Be calm, my child, be calm. You are swayed by overwhelming emotions. Be calm. Listen to me." . . .

"No! no! I cannot! My heart is bursting! My brain is crazed! To think that *you, my*

father, suffered all these years the destroyer of my mother to live ! to breathe in my presence ! to win my almost filial love and respect, and I not know it ! *Mon Dieu ! Mon Dieu !* How can such wrongs abide with us poor mortals, and we not know it !” Her sobs were wrenched from the depths of her being in wild unreasoning agony.

“Clarisse, Clarrisse, do not torture your soul in this way. Hear me out. Trust me, at least, until you know all. Recriminations are useless. Let my future acts prove to you that my past silence, my past inaction was not neglect, was not indifference. Believe me, my dear child, it costs me terrible struggles to be willing to immolate myself, but for your sake, you who were all that was left sacred to me, I have done it. . . . My child, my underlying motive was to attest an unflinching reverence for your mother’s dying behest.” . . . His voice was tender, full of touching pathos, the words were vibrations from his heart. “Come, my poor wounded dove, do be comforted. . . . Accept my love, my unceasing devotion to you, in evidence that I am not wholly to be condemned. I was mistaken, blindly mistaken, but not indifferent to you, no, not indifferent.” The tears were streaming down Clarisse’s face, and her choking sobs tormented her father pitilessly. He seemed helpless in his efforts to comfort her.

“Come, dear, suffering heart, know that your father idolizes you second only to the memory of your mother.”

These caressing words, spoken in a soothing, affectionate tone, won the spirited girl like magic, and exorcised from her heart the rash inexorable hatred, the frantic resentment, which had momentarily possessed her. She sank down beside him on a couch, and buried her face in his breast. He gently stroked the long golden tresses of her dishevelled hair, and kept softly cooing in her ears.

“My darling—dear child—poor heart, be comforted—you shall be happy—the past shall be atoned.” His great heart plunged and throbbed. His words were tendrils, insinuating about and enveloping her. The strong, the frail, despite their mighty conflict, soon would coalesce.

“Forgive me, forgive me,” finally she summoned voice to sob out, with sweet, unfeigned contrition. “What you have told me is so hard, so very, very hard to bear.” She placed both her hands upon his shoulders in a fierce clutch. “*Swear* to me, father, *swear* that you will yet *kill* that man! Then, only then, will I be comforted.”

With a face as immobile as granite, he pronounced, with uplifted hands, the oath:

“*Before God I solemnly swear to kill Count De La Rue if he still lives, or be killed in the conflict.*”

A radiance from within seemed to burst out over Clarisse's face.

“Now, my father, I can abide with you, love and revere you. Had you any idea of the all-absorbing nature of the love I have borne my

mother's memory, you might, perhaps, understand what a heart-breaking blow I have received. It maddens me beyond all bounds. . . . Father! I marvel how you could ever live through this inconsolable affliction. How can I?" She looked at him strangely, lowering her voice. "Tell me, once for all times, did he——" she hesitated, dreading to lift the veil, then added in self-reproach: "No! no! I cannot say it, that would be profanity."

Evidently her father surmised the import of her broken query, and, with the sense that his course was strictly and decently justifiable, he answered her unfinished question with the steadiness with which the builder sets the keystone of a structure that is destined to withstand the ravaging elements for all time:

"My child, your mother died as pure as a lily. Let us bury this topic for ever." Angel nor devil dare gainsay words thus spoken.

Reaction to the fierce conflict they had engaged in could not be stayed off. Father and daughter both sat for some moments in silence, communing with their own hearts.

Few artists have ever been able to place such an enshrouded tableau on canvas. Words are too vapid, too niggardly to depict it. The wrapt demon-spelled child, fierce with vengeance, so beautiful, so terrible. The father seeming like one consecrated by his oath to a holy cause, grand in his inflexibility to the future.

Clarisse arose, prompted by her good genii, put her arms about her father's neck, and, in pathetic half-whispers, said: "Father, forgive me. I am truly penitent for causing you pain. I will try to curb any future outbreaks. . . To-day has been teeming with strange things, . . . happy . . . and bitter surprises. . . . They have upset me." She kissed his brow. "Don't look so sad. . . . Make peace with me. . . . Let me share your life with you in gladness or in sadness."

"Say no more, my child. I do not censure you, nor harbour any feelings, except my own personal remorse. Should I fail in making your life happy, then, my child, I shall have miserably failed to have lived to any good purpose. . . . Good-night, my little one, pleasant dreams." . . . He kissed her with tender passion, and led her to the door.

He stood upon the threshold of the open door, watching her with involuntary pride and admiration ascend the long flight of stairs. She was such a lovely, graceful specimen of girlish womanhood, withal so high-spirited and mettlesome. Reaching the last step she loitered on the landing long enough to break a rose from the flowers she wore, kissed it ardently, and tossed it swirling through the air down to him.

"There! put that under your pillow, and the fairies will tickle your ears with tuneful melody, and open your vision to coming events!" and away she tripped out of sight.

A smile flitted over Herbert Severance's coun-

tenance at her girlish nonsense. He pressed the rose to his lips, returning to his library. He involuntarily thought, ah, she is more of a fire-opal than a pearl. Then he thought of another Clarisse in the long ago.

Clarisse paused to listen before Edith's door. All was silent. She inferred that Edith slept, and thankfully entered her own apartment, for she was in no mood even to see her friend.

She was charmed with the arrangement and fittings of her apartment. First came the little boudoir, opening into her bed-chamber, then her dressing and bath rooms were nestled at one side. Every article of furnishing seemed endued with a welcome. The whole place possessed an air of habitation. Some painstaking, experienced person had anticipated every want her capricious and indulged nature might trump up.

A dainty Buhl escritoire stood open, with writing paraphernalia of the latest wrinkle placed in full view. Nothing wanting. What a tempting invitation to write. She had, for a fact, mentally registered a vow not to sleep this night before she had written to Dick. Here was her chance. Selecting a dainty sheet of paper that took her fancy, she began without delay :

"October 1st, 188—,

"AT HOME.

"MR DRYSDALE,

"My dear Friend,—Need I write that it will afford me ineffable pleasure to receive you in my own home to-morrow evening?

"I especially desire to present you to MY FATHER!

"To-day has been by far the most eventful day in my entire life, overflowing with incredible surprises, great happiness, great sorrow—a mingling of bitter and sweet.

"In consequence, my nerves have been strung up to such a tension, I'm about wild.

"An unlooked-for incident rather forced MY FATHER to reveal to me certain unpleasant family episodes, which have inflicted upon me an unmerciful *coup*, although by-gones. I am at the present moment still cringing, feeling so hurt, with such a new sense of dread, and so frail and utterly helpless, I confess I yearn for the companionship of some staunch friend upon whom I could lay the burden of my new existence.

"Mr Drysdale, I used to boast of my bravery and endurance, but this trial has disarmed me by betraying me to dire fears of *je ne sais quoi*.

"You can understand, can't you? that the wide separation put by years between one of my *jeunesse* and my father's age renders it *difficile* for me to seek him in quest of solace. Besides, ties of blood do not wholly obliterate the innate restraint I feel, when I consider after all he and I are really scarcely acquainted. Barely a week has elapsed since I met him, and only to-day since dinner was the disclosure made to me of our relationship.

"It is all so strange—a real romance, thrilling, and verging on tragedy.

"You must pardon the glibness of my pen, for in my present frame of mind I cannot curb my yearning for companionship. And the penalty is on your own head! You remember you asked me to come to you when I needed a friend?

"Perhaps when we meet, with your consent I may talk over these vexatious topics; that is, if you will give me your word not to turn me over to Edith's cold, logical verdict.

"*En passant*, Mr Drysdale, have you any means of conveniently ascertaining whether the French painter, Count De La Rue, is in America?

"If he is not, I certainly saw his double to-night in the garden! Don't laugh at this. It is *au sérieux*.

"I trust, Mr Drysdale, that you will like my home. As for MY FATHER he is even more adorable than MY GUARDIAN *ça va sans dire*. I flatter myself that you will not be able to refrain from admiring him, or from feeling a great respect for his superior qualities. It is at this moment my cherished hope that you may be friends in the highest and fullest interpretation of the appellation.

"Until to-morrow, *au revoir*.—Ever truly,

"CLARISSE CORNEILLE SEVERANCE."

"R. S. V. P."

"There! won't Master Dick be amazed? I wonder if he will guess the truth?" she exclaimed, as she kissed the folded missive with girlish fervour, lingering over it as if to breathe in upon its pages unwritten messages that he might read between the lines.

After sealing the envelope, it flashed through her brain that it was too late to send a servant to the post. She recalled having seen a letter-bag hanging in a recess of the vestibule of the lower hall. She tip-toed down to drop her missive therein. On her return, when half-way up the stairs, the library door slid open, and her father walked out, evidently bent on his way to bed.

Impulsive child, with alertness she leaned over the balustrade, exclaiming, *sotto voce* :

"Hist! S-t-o-p th-i-e-ves!" and rippled out a merry laugh. He looked up with composure, not in the least startled, exactly as if it were a customary greeting he expected at that particular moment;

saying in a manner of half rebuke, "I thought, little truant, you had long since retired."

"Don't be grumpy, there's a dear. I've just been down to drop in the letter-bag a letter I had promised to write and post to-night." At this juncture he had attained her side, he put his arm about her waist, and went with her to her door.

"But where is your room?" she asked in a child-like way.

"Directly over yours. It corresponds in its arrangements with yours. You shall see to-morrow. Now, childie, do retire, you look worn." He kissed her forehead, and quietly ascended his flight of stairs.

She heard his door close, heard the tread of his feet overhead. Peculiar were the sensations she experienced as she thought, yes, her own father had clasped her in his arms, had told her the sad story of her mother's fate. How she now loathed Count De La Rue. The mere idea was insufferable to ponder upon, that for so many years, with childish trust, she had fondly looked up to this arrant villain as her best friend! What could have been his motives?

She wrought herself up to believe that, without a doubt, it was he in person whom she had encountered in the garden, and not his double. This being the case, what security could she ever feel anywhere against his unbidden appearance, against any harm he might plot to injure her or her father. These apprehensions tormented her,

as she prepared for bed. After retiring, for long hours she tossed restlessly, unable to cozen sleep, for she utterly failed to banish these ugly thoughts.

So many trifles of the Count's former speeches at the time she had disregarded, seemed now imbued with ominous intent. Her thoughts haunted her. In sheer desperation she forsook her bed, and resolved to seek distraction in a book. . . . No use. The book kept dropping from her listless hands into her lap, for her thoughts would stray back again into the forbidden realm. If day would only come, she might endure better her gruesome thoughts. How her brain throbbed and burned.

She caught sight of a wax taper on her dressing-table; it occurred to her to light it, and roam over the upper portion of the house, which she had not yet visited.

Moving like a spirit in her soft, white draperies noiselessly along the halls, carpeted with heavy moquette, which muffled every sound, she proceeded up the massive creakless stairs, watching, as she advanced, the fitful shadows produced by the taper light and her gliding form, dance and dart, now elongated until lost in slender nothingness, again squat and impish, then whirligigs of undefined sparkles and glints, merging and emerging in sportive phantoms.

The wall spaces of the upper hall she approached were covered with fine pictures. It afforded her veritable pleasure to look at them, although de-

ciphered with difficulty under the scant light given by her taper. Finally, the last canvas was viewed. Still she was wakeful. Finding herself facing a portiere, she lifted it cautiously, to reveal the interior of a lounging or smoking room, and a general repository for all sorts of mannish belongings, more curious than decorative. A picture—a man's portrait—attracted her attention. She carried the taper high above her head, to throw upon it a better light.

"What! It cannot be! *Mon Dieu! Je suis folle!*" With these exclamations she rushed towards the picture, clambered upon a chair, and held the taper in reckless closeness to the canvas. "Yes, yes, there can be no mistake. *It is Dick.* What does it all mean? Where am I? Am I dreaming? If not, how came Dick's portrait here in my father's house?"

Thoroughly bewildered she stepped down to the floor, rubbed her eyes, stared anew at the picture, pressed her throbbing temples, and gazed furtively about her. Half frightened, she was unable to move. Was she under some hallucination? Her heart fluttered wildly. Her knees were giving way. By an almost superhuman effort she mastered this invading weakness, and fairly flew from the room directly to her father's door, in the rush extinguishing her taper. Now her blood seemed to curdle in her veins, she felt pursued, beset on all sides: from within by her fears, from without by the unknown which skulked in the darkness.

Her nerveless fingers helplessly twined and slipped about the door-knob, powerless to turn it. Time, in her affected imagination, had stretched out to infinity. Reeling under her terror, she was about succumbing and sinking down upon the floor, when she distinguished faintly the sound of her father's heavy breathing. Like the sweep of magic all her terror was dispelled. She no longer feared aught. Strength returned. She opened the door without effort, and crept to her father's bedside, threw herself upon her knees, leant her head on the bed, and quietly uttered a prayer of thankfulness for her delivery. Here she was safe. . . . Here she was sheltered in the presence of this strong man, from the rough, cruel stabs of the wicked world. A sigh of relief escaped from her trembling lips.

A pale, faint light, the harbinger of approaching dawn, vaguely disclosed the objects in the room. Her father held in his hand the rose she had flung to him over the balustrade. Then he did not ignore sentiment. This thought pleased her, for after all her education had made her impressionable, and taught her to foster the softest, most romantic sentiments.

The disturbance occasioned by an extraneous element impinging upon the orbit of his aura, was, according to some theorists, appreciable to his sleeping consciousness.

He awoke, and, without evincing surprise, extended his hand to her.

"My dear child," he softly said, "what brings you here?"

"I couldn't sleep, and have prowled over this floor, until a nervous freak of fright drove me in to you. I entreat you to let me stay until the servants are astir. . . . I am contented here, and comfortable too, see!" She drew close beside his bed a sleepy-hollow chair, and curled up in it like a kitten in a basket.

He thought, why deny her this boon when she was evidently the victim of an access of nervousness? He consented, at the same time cautioning her against talking, on the plea that if she did she would disturb him. Soon both slept.

Rare type of girlish innocence, how naturally her filial instincts had led her to seek the protection of her father, without a glimmer of thought that her action was at variance with the diminutive proprieties of a conventional society.

At the appointed hour, with clock-like punctuality Jones entered his master's apartment to perform his customary matutinal services. Much astonished to find his young mistress asleep in the chair, he quitted the room, impressed with the importance devolving upon his shoulders to prevent the other and new servants from stumbling upon the discovery he had made. He purposely closed the door with a bang, and went to his master's bath-room, vigorously whistling—a liberty he would never otherwise have presumed to have taken—and turned on the splashing water, without his usual precaution to silence the noise.

Clarisse awoke with a start, and hastily gathered herself up, slipped out of the room, and sought her own apartment without a moment's delay ; whereas, Mr Severance, accustomed to Jones's manœuvres, slept on till Jones touched his shoulder, announcing :

"Bath ready, sir," pleased with his own tactics, but wondering if the "Guv'nor will try to play any hocus-pocus on me respecting the young missus. He ought shurly to know, after my long years in his sarvice, I can kape a family saycrit snug and tight, so he ought."

"Jones, what has become of Miss Clarisse ? When I last fell asleep, she was quietly dozing in the big chair. Had she gone when you came in ?"

"I didn't luk, sir. You didn't tell me to, sur, and I only obeys orders, sur."

Mr Severance involuntarily smiled, somewhat amused at this white lie, and thought, "Capital servant that."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BELEAGUERED CONSCIENCE.

“ I have read, in the marvellous heart of man,
That strange and mystic scroll,
That an army of phantoms, vast and wan,
Beleaguer the human soul.”

NOT even the bright fresh morning could banish from Herbert Severance's heart the dull, heavy ache. Not even the knowledge that from henceforth his daughter should be near him, and that Dick would in all probability win her, thereby making a new bond for her and for him,—a much-wished for consummation,—no, not all this could divert his thoughts from the cruel hurt.

The terrible oath he had solemnly given to Clarisse conspired to stir up bitter, bitter memories, vivifying wrongs time had, if not healed, at least dulled, and put away from his daily life.

Keen remorse kept goading him for the reprehensible way he had allowed the possibility of that scoundrel's ever knowing Clarisse. Might he not have tinctured her mind and warped her character by his constant association with her? Her nature,

so young and pliant, would likely take the hue of impressions first made. If so, was it to be hoped that he could, by one fell swoop, obliterate them? The blow he had given the previous night had truly struck her through her deepest affections, and seemed to embitter her to a frantic degree.

Facts are irrefutable, and yet nature is so cunning an intriguer against all philosophy of *should be* and *ought to be*, that she asserts the *is* she desires, despite hope or argument to the contrary. Was it not quite supposable that De La Rue sought to direct a final blow against him through her? . . . Some active means must be employed at once; first, to find out beyond peradventure whether De La Rue was in America. Should his fears be confirmed, then the next step behoved him to determine, not only his enemy's whereabouts, but, more difficult thing, his motives. His oath should be executed at all hazard. . . . Stop! . . . What right had he to thus deliberately plot against the life of any mortal? . . . His oath. . . . But did not the law beyond contravention say, "That any man or woman who shall conspire against the life of another fellow-being, kill, cause to be killed, or aid and abet in the killing, commits murder, in a greater or less degree, afterwards determinable"? This law takes no cognisance of the nameless, vicious, extenuating circumstances upon which he was now basing his own individual case. Since such a long time—eighteen years—had elapsed, he clearly saw he had not even the defence

of a furious outbreak of wrath at the time of the discovery of the wrong done him.

Then, again, if he did this deed of vengeance, he proposed to take the brunt of his crime. He spurned the bare thought of seeking to screen himself cowardly behind some accomplice, or crave mercy for extenuating circumstances. No, he would brave it through. . . . All very well in point of untested theory. . . . Noble and high spirited, but he could not ward off the publicity, the scathing shame and disgraceful horror of having all the skeletons of his past sorrows dragged forth, stripped of their winding-sheets, to be ogled at and descanted upon by the leering world!

Then, too, the reflected dishonour, the opprobrium that needs must fall upon Clarisse's innocent head—no! no! it was too appalling! It would blight her life, spoil the joy of love, rob her of certain traditional social rights dear to all. Better violate the accursed oath. Far better, even, as a last resort, end his own existence, and bury himself and his skeletons in one grave.

In thus shirking the responsibility of fulfilling his oath, to what course would it drive Clarisse? . . . She had exhibited so much spirited feeling. She had seemed repulsed from him, because he had not heretofore vindicated her dead mother's memory. . . . She would, without a doubt, abominate his weakness. . . . If that was all he feared, he could have endured that. But might she not be strung up to such a pitch—for she had threatened

to herself avenge her mother—that she might enact some desperate deed, commit some crime?

Finally, half vexed with himself for indulging in such sinister suppositions, such moral bug-a-boos, he made an effort to shake free from the trammels of his mood. Ridiculous! preposterous! for a man of his experience, his years, his practical sense, his legal knowledge, to allow his imagination to weave such melodramas! He, a man who observed rigorously all forms, followed the dictates of a law-abiding, conservative society. Bah! his brain was muzzy. He was certainly bilious, to be haggling thus between his *conscience*, *the devil*, and *the hangman*!

All his mental badgering, however, did not liberate him from his deeply-seated perplexity. He seemed to be morally driven to the wall. There were no returning footsteps. He must push through, crush or be crushed. . . .

“Father! father! are you never coming to breakfast? We’re starved!” rang out Clarisse’s clear, sweet voice. It recalled Mr Severance to his right every-day state of mind, and brought to his attention the corporeal necessities of mundane angels, as well as those of robust men.

CHAPTER XIX.

CABALISTIC CUPID.

“A mind might ponder itself for ages, and not gain so much self-knowledge as the passion of love shall teach it in a day.”

WHILE they breakfasted, Jones entered the breakfast-room, bringing on a salver a note for Clarisse, saying the messenger awaited an answer.

Clarisse glanced at her father and then at Edith for permission to break the seal. She nervously did so. Her face became suffused crimson, as she recognised Dick's chirography.

“MY DEAR MISS CORNEILLE SEVERANCE,—Your interesting and most flattering epistle received by first post this morning. I hasten to reply. Pardon the liberty I shall take in sending a special messenger with instructions to await an answer.

“If entirely agreeable to you, I should deem it a very great privilege to be allowed to transgress etiquette, and antedate your invitation for this evening by calling at noon instead. May I?

“In truth, my dear Clarisse” (she blushed deeply, and furtively looked up at Edith), “I have a very important matter to communicate to you, and I feel great impatience to do so without delay. Every moment now to me seems to throw around me an air of deception. I fear, should you make a certain discovery, and dwell too long upon it, with-

out some word of explanation from me, that you might yield, for the moment, to the feeling that I had wilfully deceived you.

"Pray waive all ceremony and grant my request.

"Impatiently awaiting your response, I remain, sincerely and devotedly yours,

"RICHARD DRYSDALE."

"VICTORIA HOTEL,

"*Thursday, 10 A.M.*"

With the true impulse of a woman, she cast a quizzical glance at her father, throwing her head archly on one side, saying :

"A note from Mr Drysdale. I should like to receive him this morning, unless you object. Jones, fetch me my portfolio, please."

Mr Severance laughed heartily. Clarisse looked in astonishment at him, and shook her finger.

"I have a bone to pick with you the moment I have finished my note. I've found you out, you precious humbug !"

"MY DEAR MR DRYSDALE,—Pray come at eleven if you wish. I am wild to compare you with your counterfeit presentment.—Yours truly,

"CLARISSE C. SEVERANCE."

"AT HOME, *Breakfast Hour.*"

After dispatching the note, she turned square upon her father.

"Father, tell me how you happen to have Mr Drysdale's portrait in the smoking-room upstairs ? I saw it last night when I was prowling about."

"Certainly, my child, that is no secret. Dick Drysdale, you must know, is my nephew, and was brought up by me. What's the matter ? You

look astonished. Is there anything marvellous in my statement?"

"*Marvellous ! Mon Dieu ! Marvellous !* I should say decidedly, *yes !* Edith, is it not like a romance? Just fancy how completely in the dark we have all been all these months. Now I think about it, it occurs to me I never once mentioned my guardian's name, nor did he ever name his uncle. It is so very, very strange. I feel that some way I've been made a goose of. Won't Mrs Bleecker be amazed! Ah, how fast the wheel of fate turns for me these few days. I grow giddy. Come, Edith, let's go up stairs and see Dick's portrait. Will you come too, father?"

"No, my child, not now. When you want me you will find me in the library."

The two girls tripped up the stairs. Clarisse, in advance, burst into the room where the portrait hung, and dashed straight for it. The chair, upon which the night before she had stood to inspect it, remained in a tell-tale manner on the same spot. She now proceeded to recount to Edith her nocturnal ramble, and her scare when she discovered Dick's portrait.

"Actually, Edith, I thought that I was losing my senses, after the fright I had in the garden, this to follow; and, Edith, I rushed into father's room—and, Edith, I curled up and slept in a chair beside his bed all night—and, Edith, *voilà tout !*"

"What an impulsive girl you are, Clarisse! *Au sérieux*, tell me, are you in love with Mr Drysdale?"

"I only know this, Edith, whatever it is that prompts the feelings, no one I ever met has had the same magical influence over me that Dick has. No one ever fills my heart with such throbs of anticipation, or leadens it with such pangs of despair. I think of him, I dream of him constantly. And—well, Edith, *au fond du cœur*, I feel he *is my fate* for good or evil, for joy or woe! Is that love?"

"Perhaps. I hope so, for your sake. But, Clarisse, do you not think Mrs Bleeker's theory of '*propinquity*' may not have something to do with your sentiments? For instance, if other male associates had mingled with you as freely and constantly as Dick, is it not possible that some one of them might have enlisted your heart?"

Clarisse had shaken her head all the time Edith had been talking, from the moment she caught the drift of her words.

"Nonsense! Edith. There were Dick's companions, *par exemple*; they had the same chance, but they were not for me, not one of them. No! no! no! absolutely not for me. It was to be Dick or no one! Dick! Dick! only Dick!"

"Clarisse, pray be careful, do not in a moment of exalted sentimentality, risk your entire future. Sometime, perhaps, I will tell you a story bearing upon just such a mistake." Her face clouded as she spoke, her voice saddened. "Tell you how a girl has lived since discovering she was cheated, a broken, defrauded life; is cynical and distrustful,

because the one man, she had fixed her affections upon, was unworthy of her, unworthy of any woman. Ah! my more than sister, I tell you from the bottom of my heart, that such blunders spoil the lives of numberless women." Edith had expressed all this with so much pent-up feeling, Clarisse impulsively threw her arms about her neck.

"Oh, Edith, *ma chérie!* how sorry I am that you should have been so unhappy."

"Did I say, dear, it was of myself I spoke?"

"No, not in so many words, but I know intuitively that you did mean yourself. I am so sorry. But, Edith, I know this *is love, real true love*, I feel for Dick. Pure, unalloyed love, and no mistake about it. If I am cheated, then veritably all life's joys will be for ever eclipsed, nought worth living for. Nothing."

"I hope it is reciprocated in kind. Only beware. Do not centre all your future on any man, not, at least, till he proves worthy of your love. That is all I have to offer. Come, let us go down. I am in no mood to view all these fine canvases. I am not an artist this morning; I am a weak, repining woman. Another time I should be fierce to examine every picture in its minutest detail, eager to make studies from some special ones, but, not to-day."

"Edith, how your melancholy mood upsets me. Are you ill? No? Then what ails you? Oh, I see, you are jealous of me! Fie, oh, fie!" gleefully laughed out Clarisse.

"Come, you silly girl, be quiet. I'm not quite so degenerate a dolt as to envy you a presupposed happiness. Affinities are mostly bosh. Listen, what music is that we hear?"

"Dick! yes, Dick's voice."

Down stairs Clarisse rushed, and uncere-
moniously, into the library, where Dick was with
her father. Dick stepped forward to meet her,
but Clarisse impulsively threw herself into his
arms, exclaiming:

"Dick, we are cousins now!"

"Yes, Clarisse, cousins now, but," he kissed her
forehead, "happy delirium, perhaps something
more, and dearer, very, very soon. What do you
say, uncle?"

"My dear children, you storm my heart with un-
expected rapture. You have my soul-felt blessing."

As he talked he had placed his arm about
Clarisse's waist, and laid one hand on Dick's
shoulder. The trio made a *tableau vivant* in-
tensely human, passionate, and more than pictur-
esque.

What buzzing confabulation. The barriers were
all down. Clarisse, as also did Dick, accepted the
situation as lovers without any preambling "ifs"
or "perhapes."

Fate, or something better, had drawn aside the
veil of circumspection like magic. They knew one
another from thenceforth in the familiar uncon-
strained light that bursts upon all young fresh
hearts in their first propitious attachment.

Herbert Severance proudly, yet with reserved sadness, contemplated Dick and Clarisse for a few moments, then, with hollow affectation of jocularly, strove to hide his true feelings beneath a commonplace pointless remark.

"Children, as I am your sole relative, father, guardian, uncle, and future father-in-law considered in one and the same person, I know in my plurality I must be a very *de trop* outgriffinish griffin. So, good morning," and he bowed himself out of the room.

Once they were alone, Dick's impulse was to give vent in rapturous extravagances to the old, old story. However, Clarisse was too impatient to tell him all which had transpired during the most momentous day just past. She entertained a vague idea that he only could dissipate the depressing forebodings which hung over her, in spite of the joy she felt in his acknowledged love for her. Finally, she wound up a lengthy narration by saying :

"Dick, can you find out where Count De La Rue now is? I have the conviction that Mr Rodgers will know. Somehow the two men seem to me to be working some evil against me."

"My darling," thoughtfully and fervently replied Dick, "trust to your father and me to settle all these unpleasantnesses. Rest content that no stone will be left unturned to free you from future annoyance, but you must hold yourself strictly aloof from the entire matter."

In her confidences to Dick, she had omitted

telling him of the vow she had exacted from her father. It was no intention to deceive him. It was rather one of those innumerable instances when even the most united and all-encompassing loves consistently allow some leaves to remain uncut in the new book of Love. Is it not possibly with the undefined idea that—

“Cupid is a casuist,
A mystic, and a cabalist;
Can your lurking thoughts surprise,
And interpret your device? . . .
Heralds high before him run;
He has ushers many a one;
He spreads his welcome where he goes,
And touches all things with his rose?”

CHAPTER XX.

EDITH'S SECRET.

"A wild amazement hurries up and down
The little number of your doubtful friends."

MRS BLEECKER greeted as glad tidings Clarisse's and Dick's betrothal. Society heard the banns, generally approved, smiled a pert, significant smile, so bland and insinuating, and said :

"Most astonishing revelation ! . . . Never dreamed Mr Severance had enough romance in his composition to have husbanded the harvest of his wild oats in such strict secrecy. . . . A college affair, doubtless. . . . One cannot be too rigidly particular in culling out the social list. . . ."

To a certain patent pill-maker's pseudo aristocratic daughter, Edward Kingston retorted with unconcealed acrimony :

"Pray, my dear madam, what aggrievance has society to prate because Mr Severance, like the dignified, reserved man that he is, has decently kept out of sight and hearing his own personal affairs ? Why does it follow that therein lurks any mystery or scandal ? For my part, it seems that the greatest of social vices unrepressed is the

morbid, maudlin tendency to pluck the bandage from heart wounds, or to reveal the scar where we have been hit by fate's flying wheel. Bah! it's a species of moral mendicancy that should be out-ruled, and hooted down in all refined society!"

"Dear! oh, dear! Mr Kingston, what a fiery dragon you are to terrorize in this fashion poor innocent me! All the same, Mr Kingston, even you must admit that Mr Severance's very, very long secrecy has no parallel in genteel society? Then, what proof have we, Mr Kingston, that Miss Cornelle Severance, as she is pleased to call herself now, is a proper person to countenance and receive in select society?"

"Great heavens!" abruptly exclaimed Mr Kingston, with an expression of unmitigated contempt for the barefaced affrontery of this simpering parvenu, "is the fabric of society so flimsy and shabby, so utterly degenerate, that it cannot discriminate the genuineness or spuriousness between ermine and skunk skins? However, madam, in fine I must take the liberty of vouchsafing in behalf of my friends that they are not applicants on probation for the recognition of society. They are, in truth, of such as make the stamina and staple of the most refined society."

Each day opened out to Clarisse and Dick new hopes, and enlarged the horizon of a brighter future far more promising than either had at first dared to dream. Mr Severance was involved inextricably in all their youthful plans. They would take no

refusal on his part to join their amusements. With pride, and the charming grace of an old school gentleman, he always assisted Clarisse to receive at her "At homes," imparting thereto a lustre and dignity not one carper could discount.

Edith had, in natural sequence, become a regular institution in the home circle; nothing was complete or rounded out to the full without her presence. Her rare, fine sensitiveness made her know beyond peradventure, that she "*was as one among the rest*;" yet her individuality or personal independence were never disturbed nor conflicted with in the slightest degree. Mr Severance personally found great solace in her companionship, for she was more of the world than was Clarisse. As he used to say jocosely:

"She is an example of an improved method—no one has patented—of welding steel and gold and woman together."

One unfortunate day, when she stood gazing out of the window in his library, he sat watching her from his desk, and chanced to notice a shade of sadness overcast her face, which prompted him to ask, with great tenderness:—

"Why your sadness, Miss Longstreth?" She, amazed and in her confusion, shook her head without a word.

Not to be put off by this meagre negation, he continued, "Miss Longstreth, pardon the question, but why have you never married?"

Her face suffused crimson. She started as if

some one had dealt her an untoward blow. She turned and looked searchingly at him, "Mr Severance, what prompts you to ask me this just now?"

"Well, if I must answer, because when you think you are unobserved I have noticed that you often look sad and dejected. Just now you looked especially so. You do nothing without a reason, and it has occurred to me that you have reason for your sorrow, and I fancy as well some unhappy reason for remaining single."

"Yes, Mr Severance, you have truly divined. I have a great sorrow, which I will confess to you has tinged my mature years with sombre repinings, and, worse than all, with distrust." She passed her hand with evident pressure across her forehead several times, gave a resolute twitch to her head, and, with a forced smile, added: "But shame upon me for this weakness. I make a rule never to allow myself to play the sniveller, and whine about by-gones. . . . Fact is, I've been too lazy lately, that's the mischief. Just now the association of ideas, like the scales on a serpent's body, overlapped, and folded in and out, one upon and with another, till I came upon the venomous fangs of the old regret. You found me out, unarmed! *See*, I can shake off the mood in a trice!" She drew herself up with renewed resolution, and again forced a strained smile, meaningless and purposeless in effect, but brave and womanly.

Mr Severance arose, walked across the room to

her side, shook his head in admonition, looked squarely into her eyes, and said gently :

“ My dear child, *that* kind of mastery costs you undue suffering. Don't do it. I have long yearned to speak to you and proffer my sympathy, not with the idea of intruding upon your confidence or seeking to fathom your trials, but as one whose own life has been masked to shield himself from the hurtful invidious eyes of the world upon his sorrows, and possibly his sins as well. In brief, my dear child, solitary man that I am in many respects, I have selfishly, perhaps, craved a sterling companionship, and I have humanly argued that possibly if you could repose confidence in some one—pardon the egotism which leads me to say, like myself—who would stand without the invisible barrier when you sought to seclude yourself unmolested even by that one, it might be a comfort to you. Am I mistaken ? ”

“ Not entirely, Mr Severance,” she frankly responded, “ but my principle in life is to shoulder to the bitter end my own personal burdens and bear them bravely, although the weight gradually crushes me into the grave.” Then with the sparkle of her normal self-assertion and enmantled in abnegation, she looked him unflinchingly in the face, and uttered in the metallic voice of a herald, “ Courage in silence, strength in calamity, hope in woe, are my cardinal tenets of faith. My motto, as you know, is *LABOR OMNIA VINCIT*. At the root of laziness or the indolence of introspection

sprouts a crop of baneful weeds. Bless us, poor sinners, every mortal has some hardship. But, after all, life has many bright compensations. I think with Hamlet, '*For there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.*' Accordingly I shall think I'm perfectly and unreservedly happy, and, presto, I'll be happy! Out, out upon morbidness!"

Evidently the turn the conversation had taken rather disappointed Herbert Severance. In a disconcerted halting way, minus that quality of excellent persistence with which a younger man might have carried his point, he said with a sigh:

"Alas, I fear I have stupidly blundered. Henceforth you will be on guard, to conceal or belittle the tenor of your moods, lest I may strive to solve their import. I am more than sorry, for I enjoy beyond expression your utter naturalness."

She interrupted him:

"Have no apprehensions, I beg you, Mr Severance, I shall ever be the same as heretofore in my attitude before you. This much I will promise you, that, if I ever feel my fortitude enfeebled, I shall seek you out with thankfulness, and '*unpack my heart with words.*'"

"Miss Longstreth, to say thank you, would be inane and hackneyed, but I do earnestly assure you, to be the recipient of your confidence will be at all times extremely flattering to me."

Then turning the subject, he seemed as another man. A certain inexorable expression made his countenance most forbidding.

"Miss Longstreth, did you perchance meet Count De La Rue at the convent where you met Clarisse?"

Edith turned pallid, fairly staggered, as she grasped both of Mr Severance's arms above the elbow, stared with frowning brows up into his face, and just managed to articulate :

"In mercy's name! *why do you ask that question now?* You beset me, Mr Severance."

"Come, sit down. Compose yourself, and I will tell you freely." He sat her down, and drew a chair alongside her. He was indeed abashed and astonished by her unlooked-for display of emotion. She did not look at him as he proceeded :

"You cannot certainly account it strange, that I am anxious to know what stamp of man Count De La Rue is generally considered, inasmuch as circumstances conspired to place Clarisse under his unrestricted influence for so many years—years, too, when her character was in a formative state. Moreover, I have many private reasons for distrusting the man. Sometimes of late I have thought that he had designs, not altogether honourable, upon her. Surely, in your long intimacy with Clarisse, you must have seen him?"

He paused to give her the chance to answer. In blank silence she stared fixedly at the carpet. In

a moment he continued, although embarrassed by her air of abstraction :

“Possibly, Miss Longstreth, you have heard through some avenue the slanderous rumours that the dastardly Count De La Rue has set abrew, through his valiant emissary, that young scape-grace Jasper Rodgers ?”

“Yes,” she faintly answered, “I have heard many very compromising stories, not only about Clarisse, but, pardon me, sir, about you also.”

“Miss Longstreth, you will doubtless admit that, in my long practised profession, I have gained some powers of discernment—some unwritten knowledge of deduction, therefore, I hope I am not overstepping the mark when I intimate that your conduct, to all appearances, exposes you to the supposition that you are more deeply concerned in Count De La Rue than my recent query would naturally imply !”

She was taken unawares, and looked confused and guilty of being at least found out, if only at the barrier, still found out.

“In heaven’s name, tell me frankly, Miss Longstreth, am I right ?”

Without an instant’s faltering, without a politic pause to collect herself, but boldly and truthfully, this grand woman replied :

“Mr Severance, you are right, *I am* concerned in Count De La Rue. He it was who played with my affections until all faith in human constancy has been uprooted, and in its place has sprung up

an imperishable unbelief. Let me say in justice to myself that this man, who was the age of my father, this man who is a genius of no small order, even renowned in both continents, was most charming to me. He fascinated me so completely in the flush of my girlish enthusiasm and natural impressionability that he became my *beau ideal*. . . . However, be that as it may, he was heartless, and set no store on my feelings. . . . I, as other women before and since, served to amuse him *pour passer le temps*, and in the end found I was cruelly hurt. There is something so warped, a quality so inharmonious in his character which I have never been able to define. . . ." She paused, half inclined to stop, but during the momentary lapse of silence decided to proceed. "You should know, Mr Severance, that the abnegating devotion he has ever exhibited towards Clarisse, reveals a latent, noble trait in his nature worthy of a more whole-souled man. I never was able to evoke from him why he was thus wrapt up in the child. I used to think there was an ugly mystery hidden beyond my ken. When I fully realised his perfidy and his heartless insincerity to me, I became doubly interested in Clarisse's welfare."

Mr Severance broke in upon her, saying warmly, "For which, Miss Longstreth, I am ineffably grateful."

"Wait a moment, Mr Severance, I do not deserve so much. At first my adherence to Clarisse was actuated by my terror lest he should

possibly be base enough to play the wanton with her affections. I was jealous of him at this time. I guarded her with avenging watchfulness over him. However, he was truly noble and pure in his devotion to her. To this day she knows naught of our old attachment, nor even that I knew him before going to the convent. When it was decided that she should come to America, he threatened to follow her. I have no doubt she saw him that ominous night in the garden. He is at present in New York. This morning I received a note from Jasper Rodgers, in which he states, with brutal plainness amounting to coarseness, that Count De La Rue has narrated to him a racy scandal concerning you and Clarisse, and that I as an innocent party should at once sever my connection with a family who will very soon be hauled over in the annals of the police gazette. . . .”

“Shameless coward! How dare he lisp one word against Clarisse! My God, it is insufferable! I fear I shall do some rash act!” He was frantic through rage.

“Mr Severance, will you allow me to suggest that you lose no time in settling these rumours with these cowards, which you only can do with ungloved hands? If needs be for your family's protection, seek redress of the law, but suppress at once the slanderous innuendoes these fellows are guilty of delivering, now uncurbed, at the clubs they frequent. I should suppose it would not be difficult now that you know absolutely the parties.” She

pondered a moment, then added with regret : "I could not have believed that Count De La Rue could have resorted to such a degraded course. It does not seem possible, for with all his failings and iniquities he never seemed coarse and low."

Alas ! human nature, especially woman's nature, clings with rare tenacity to the objects of affection although only a memory. A woman can find some palliation for even heinous crimes, or baseless excuses for ignoble tendencies, albeit she has learnt to despise the man ; a certain pride and *amour propre* in defending what has once been cherished ; a glozing over faults which tax the acuteness of her own penetration if viewed in the glare of the unsoftened light of truth. Women forgive, aye, and shield, although they may not forget. Beneficent trait of womanliness, to hold aloof from hard logic.

"Why do you not see Count De La Rue ?" Edith plied the question with a certain archness that arrested Mr Severance's attention.

"Well, I've no objections, but I fear it will be a very disastrous interview. Will you be shocked to learn that Clarisse has exacted a promise from me to *kill Count De La Rue* ?" He watched her beneath his brows with the stealthiness of a cat, as he pronounced these words. She intuitively felt his gaze, although her eyes were averted, and held in check any betraying emotion induced as she spoke.

"He is a dapperster with weapons. Any encounter

of which he might be forewarned, even with his peer, I apprehend, Mr Severance, would result in a murderous struggle, in which he most likely would be victor. Pray, sir, is there no law to redress such wrongs *without murder?*" A subtle horror had crept over her face, she lipped but did not articulate above her breath the last words. The wicked import had loomed up beyond any palpable dissemblance. It would be *murder* in the full comprehension of the deed.

"Call it what you will, Miss Longstreth, I'm in no mood to bandy words on this topic. I avow that to me there are some crimes the penalty of the law does not cope with to the full. Each individual wronged must decide and act for himself. There are certain legal sophistries which moral arguments may sustain in general, but the injured party revolts against their paucity."

"My soul spurns such extreme, perilous methods. The entire social structure would be a wreck with such views. I should personally rather endure till death the worst wrong, than defile my soul by such crime!" She hurled these words at Mr Severance with scathing upbraiding. He regretted his unwise unleashing of hidden thoughts. The evil was done. How recant with sufficient guise of earnestness, not to excite in her the suspicion that he strained the truth merely to appease her.

"After all, Miss Longstreth," he calmly said, "you are perfectly correct. One ought, if rational, to consider such a vital matter dispassionately.

Just now I foolishly gave full rein to my slumbering emotion. The fact is, for some time my feelings have been unduly taxed. The stress of late upon my fortitude has been extremely severe." Although coherent, his sentences were jerky and curt.

"Mr Severance, our conversation has made me very unhappy. I think it would be just as well if I absent myself from your household for the time being, that is, if I can do so without creating undesirable comment from outsiders, or arouse Clarisse's and Dick's suspicions."

She did not propound this, to witness what effect it might produce, nor to evoke protestations from Mr Severance, but with native straightforward seriousness.

"Very well, Miss Longstreth. Much as I should regret such a step, depriving us of your presence,—indeed you have grown indispensable to the completeness of our family circle,—I have no wish to have you remain when you are unhappy. You must follow the dictates of your own judgment. By-the-bye, how about Henry Bacon's wedding at New Rochelle, which you young people were to attend, is that off the docket?"

"Oh, no. The wedding is to take place on the evening of the 9th of this month, and the reception is sensibly to be given by the newly-married couple in their own home on the succeeding evening. I will accompany Clarisse. Afterward, I can consistently plan to make a voyage to Europe, return-

ing in ample season for Clarisse's wedding. In the meantime, Mr Severance, let me importune you to forget that we have had *this* conversation." She was about to leave the room, when he addressed her in a much broken voice.

"Miss Longstreth, I esteem your fealty to my daughter too highly to feel exonerated in my own mind from the blame which arises from the fact that aught I have said has pained. Will you forgive me?"

"Bless you! my dear, dear, good friend, it is me who should be suing for pardon at your feet! The disparity of our ages, the circumstances, all things considered, should have sufficed to spare you from my wayward opinions. Let it be all cancelled."

Great-hearted woman, she had the spirit to brave through any personal trouble but the thought of having wounded one of whom she was fond, filled her with deep contrition. Somehow she felt she was standing in a false light in Mr Severance's estimation, and that her character was distorted by some inverse process.

He, too, thought by some stupid blunder that he must have impressed Miss Longstreth with a false idea of himself.

They were both at such imaginary counter-purposes, they tacitly felt that further conversation doubtless would but complicate their present dilemma.

"One word, Miss Longstreth, despite your opinion of me, I must entreat you to ever love

and cherish Clarisse. She is, as you know, a pure, lovely child, entitled to the most honoured position. She deserves the staunchest friendship of the purest women. Whatever have been my sins, my shortcomings, I assure you there should be no reflection cast upon her. Will you promise me this?"

"No, not as a promise to you," she replied in a spirit of feigned resentment. "I owe all that, and more, to Clarisse, without placing myself in bondage. You see, Mr Severance, I strive to be loyal to my friends, each one for himself, without co-operative bonds to hold me fast!"

"Chivalrous woman!" exclaimed Mr Severance.

She laughed, and passed out of the room, reluctant to hear or utter another word.

CHAPTER XXI.

JASPER'S CALAMITY.

"Thou cam'st not to thy place by accident."

QUICK as possible, Edith, after quitting Mr Severance, equipped herself for the street, determined upon seeing Mrs Bleecker, to confide to her the import of the note she had received from Jasper Rodgers, and take the little lady's advice thereupon.

Hurrying along the street, much occupied with her own thoughts, she met Edward Kingston. His face was the picture of a great worry. He was walking at such a rapid rate, that he almost passed Edith before observing who she was.

After an informal, hasty salutation, he exclaimed very abruptly :—

"Are you going past that corner?"

"Yes, on my way to Mrs Bleecker's."

"For God's sake! don't go that way, Miss Longstreth; a drunken man has fallen over the railings of the hotel, and it is supposed he has broken his neck! Turn aside! The sight is too appalling." His agitation indicated more than ordinary horror.

"Do you know who it is?" Like a flash she put this question. His hesitation prompted a suspicion, she urged: "Tell me, is it any person we know? If you do not answer, I'll go straight to the spot, and find out for myself."

Still he hesitated. She bent her steps in the direction of the hotel, where a buzzing crowd had collected. He saw evasion was useless.

"Yes, unfortunately we know the poor ruined fellow too well. It is Jasper Rodgers."

"Jasper Rodgers! No, no, you must be mistaken! I had a letter from him this noon. Oh, Mr Kingston, it cannot be."

"Alas, Miss Longstreth, it is too true. I was just emerging from the chemist's, when he staggered out of a *coupé*, and before my very eyes, reeled head first over the railing in front of the hotel, twenty feet or more, down to the stone pavement of the area below! He now lies there lifeless, a pitiful heap of degraded humanity!"

"Mr Kingston, I feel half guilty, for my hand was raised menacingly against that man. Through a singular coincidence, I was just on my way to Mrs Bleecker's, to solicit her clear judgment as to how I should act in reference to an insinuating, ungentlemanly note he presumed to write to me."

"Fact is, Miss Longstreth, Jasper has been in a bad way for some weeks,—the worse for drink, sinking into a continuous state of dissipation and sottishness. He had become violently quarrelsome. Then, with utter shamelessness as to his condition,

he stubbornly kept presenting himself at clubs, where he was certain to be summarily turned out. For a few days past he has been on an unusually terrific spree—lost to shame—into no end of vulgar rows. We have all tried our level best to dissuade him from his ruinous course, but every effort on our part has tended to aggravate him, and excite him to unheard-of outrages. Last night, for example, a gentleman who had purchased one of Jasper's best pictures, a real gem in itself, whilst yet in the studio, asked Jasper to put his *chiffre* higher up on the canvas. Certainly not an unreasonable request. Without one word, he slashed a cross through the centre of the picture with his palette-knife, and turning jeeringly to his patron, asked, 'How do you like my mark of genius?' "

"What a pity, what a pity," compassionately murmured Miss Longstreth, "I cannot but feel that if he had been understood or managed he might have been influenced for better things. I don't believe in utter depravity. He had two sides to his nature. He had fine artistic appreciation of the beautiful. His pictures were often inspired. In view of these attributes, I cannot believe that he was doomed to be damned."

"Bah ! Miss Longstreth, don't waste your breath on him. He was a bad egg, no good. Bound to go to perdition in spite of everything. He was unbearable once he began to spree, insulted everybody right and left. No use, the sooner such creatures get to the end of their tether the better."

“How bitter hard we all are against the down-fallen. How can we dare hope for mercy. Our present vaunted enlightenment don’t soften our hearts, I fear. . . . Had Mr Rodgers no immediate family?”

“His genealogy and early life are a complete mystery to all of his intimates. He was supposed to have been born in the West Indies, and anon it was whispered among the club-men, because of his fiery temper, that he had a trace of Portuguese blood in his veins. But it is all mere speculation. He always railed out against a boastful genealogy, advancing the statement that his family should be of his own election.”

“Had he a private fortune?”

“Apart from the handsome revenue his profession brought him, he must have been in the enjoyment of some considerable means, for he squandered money recklessly, and never was known to be *strapped*. His independence on this score made him all the more incorrigible, for he never was on the footing of a borrower to be brought up at a round turn by a refusal.”

At this stage of their conversation, they had reached Mr Severance’s dwelling. Mr Kingston expressed the desire to see Dick at once, and if Miss Longstreth thought it probable that he would be there, perhaps, under the circumstance, the breach of etiquette might be pardonable if he called.

Dick was there. . . . After the consternation

over Jasper's disaster had somewhat abated, the young men conferred together as to the proper steps necessary in order to care decently for Jasper, in event that there was no claim made for his remains. He had been their former comrade, therefore they desired to do the right thing by him apart from recent animosity.

That revulsion of feeling which comes to all when death has fallen upon one in our midst, when every harsh word or severe criticism is regretted, came to this little group of young folk. Mr Severance entered the room where they were assembled, and heard the shocking details. Perceiving the turn their feelings were disposed to take, he came out blunt and strong upon the subject.

"Do be consistent, my youthful sympathisers. Remember this one thing, the man's character is no better or worse because of this doleful accident than it was previously. I think there is a pernicious tendency to indulge in a puerile sentimentality now-a-days. I, for one, have the most immutable contempt for Mr Jasper Rodgers as a character, dead or alive. Society is well quit of such a parody of a man before he does any more mischief. Don't suppose I desire to interfere with a humane and decent burial, but I should stipulate, if I had any voice in the affair, that there be no nonsensical prating to extenuate his faults, no panegyrical exaggerations of virtues, which he had long out-lived, if ever he had any. If I was a

clergyman, I could portray a graphic moral out of the sure and swift damnation of such a calamitous life as his has been."

His speech was acrid. Jasper's sudden death had not propitiated him. The wicked venom with which the dead man had so lately beslimed over Clarisse's fair name, with evil intent, would live and be revived by those busy social dwarfs, who fetch and carry with indefatigable diligence, worthy a better occupation, the tit-bits, the gamey morsels, to cater to the unwholesome appetite of ghoulish scandal-mongers and gossips. He did not forget, he could not forgive.

The evening journals contained a sensational leader on the frightful and fatal accident which had befallen the distinguished, well-known painter and *habitué* of the *haut monde*, Mr Jasper Rodgers. Then followed a long list of his most meritorious pictures, comments of a dubious tone on the mystery of his life, his late dissipation, and finally the amount of his life-insurance, \$50,000, and surmises as to the amount of his personal fortune and assets, ending by a request that any and all relatives would oblige the committee of gentlemen in charge of the funeral obsequies by communicating at once to the secretary of the Artists' Club.

The ensuing morning, the newspapers were harping *in extenso* upon the lamentable affair,—new developments, clue to previous mystery, &c., &c. All sorts of opinions were advanced, not devoid of

a certain cleverness, although generally unsubstantiated, as to the dead man's private life and early history.

Comically enough, there were in all thirteen maternal applications made by letter, or telegraph, or in person, by Widows "Rodgers," who, each and every one, claimed to possess indisputable proofs that he was her long lost son. The various body-marks described to identify him would have illustrated copiously a Japanese book on tatooing. It was a fine snare to be unravelled. However, amongst his private papers was found a regular will, executed and properly signed in due legal form, and of recent date. It was an irrefutable document, mothers or no mothers, unless that medico-legal see-saw—insanity—was instituted. Fortunately the riotous rackets of a drunken man could not be set down to insanity in this case. His eccentricities, and the sequences thereof, might be reasonably charged to idiotic obstinacy, for no rational free agent would deliberately pursue such a course of debauchery, but no jury could justly render a verdict that Jasper Rodgers was insane. Hence the adventitious mothers, with their borrowed grief, were one and all defeated.

Jasper's will did even him great credit. It condoned measurably for many of his shortcomings. After his funeral,—which he stipulated should be unostentatious, from the "LITTLE CHURCH ROUND THE CORNER,"—and his personal debts were paid.

"I bequeath all my cash deposits, stock, and

real estate investments (here followed a full list and memoranda) to the Society of Impecunious Painters, the same to be delivered without useless delay. I bequeath all my unsold paintings to Mrs Rachel Bleecker, to sell for the benefit of the Foundling Hospital under her auspices, except the sketch of herself, made from memory, which I bequeath to the Hospital. My life-insurance money, assured by my demise—how droll—to be put in the hands of six trustees, hereafter mentioned, as an endowment fund, to defray the expenses and remunerate, by an equal division of the sum total, two scientific physicians of note, who must devote two years each to the serious investigation of *hereditary dipsomania and its cure*.

“NOTE.—*Because drink has been my life-long curse,—a curse I could avoid for a time, but never completely escape,—I bequeath this particular money, which is as Death’s prize, to be devoted to this research, in behalf of other poor devils similarly afflicted.*

“To my toleraters, my apologies.

“To my enemies, my biography.

“JASPER RODGERS.”

“Witnessed by—

Wm. Brown, Sexton.

Jno. Jones, Janitor.”

CHAPTER XXII.

GOD, MAN, AND DEVIL.

“——— Some tempest rise
And blow out all the stars that light the skies,
To shroud my shame.”

“ It was the wild midnight,
A storm was on the sky ;
The lightning gave its light,
And thunder echoed by.”

HENRY BACON'S wedding festivities had attracted the young people, leaving the house quite deserted. With grave solemnity Herbert Severance sat at his desk scanning an open note.

“September 9th.

“MR SEVERANCE,

Dear Sir,—I hope that you will not disregard my request for an interview in the privacy of your own library, or wherever you may appoint, any date after September 10th. I make the request, desirous of having the long-sought opportunity of acquitting myself of a sacred behest.

“ ARMANDE DE LA RUE.”

“Humph! what can he be driving at?” contemptuously ejaculated Herbert Severance.
“Sacred! Indeed, the varlet does not know the

primary meaning of the word. . . . However, I'll accede. Better, far better have it over whilst the girls and Dick are absent. To-morrow will be the 11th, and I'll despatch a letter making an appointment here for to-morrow." In accordance with this plan he wrote:—

"September 10th.

"COUNT DE LA RUE.

"Sir,—Yours received. Contents noted. Agreeable to your request I have concluded to make an appointment for to-morrow evening, September 11th, at 9.30 o'clock, at my residence.—Hastily,

"HERBERT SEVERANCE."

He laid his letter aside, and once more contemplated De La Rue's letter.

"Yes, I have distinctly read it. No mistake whatever. Ah, well, I'll post my answer the last thing to-night myself."

He took from his pocket a bunch of keys, and began to unlock the private drawers in his desk. "Ah, it is meet that I put my house in order. One never knows when the hour has struck. It makes not a jot of difference when, if one is only prepared." Thus he kept incessantly muttering to himself, as if he talked with immaterialised visitants who flitted before his mental vision, as he set about arranging his papers in neat packets, labelling each and every lot in the most methodical manner, with an inventorial list of the subject matter.

The night was extraordinarily wild and stormy, full of clanging booms of volleying thunder. Dazzling sheets of lightning followed with such

rapid, blinding succession, the very heavens seemed on fire. Oceans of water descended with such unabated rush, it seemed the entire earth must surely dissolve and be washed away to nothingness. More and more deafening crashed the thunderbolts, echoing forth menace to all mundane strongholds, and danger hung over all, as though held only momentarily in check by Supreme Power.

The storm's prolonged violence in time attracted the thoughtful man's attention. He rose to take a casual glance out of the window. An untempered hurricane bellowed down with breath of anger upon and across the entire town, relentlessly tossing, bowing, and dismembering huge trees, with prodigious havoc. Gazing out upon its manifest fury, he experienced a measure of solicitude for the safety of his solid dwelling. He fancied that he felt it rock, or at least felt the vibration caused by the successive shocks of battering branches and storm-wrenched timbers from adjacent buildings, as they crashed through the air, and resoundingly struck the pavement, or sent window sashes and panes shivering into a thousand clattering fragments. Shutters beat a mutinous alarm, banging rudely to and fro against the houses, every now and again, with such rudeness as to wrest their hinges loose from the masonry, and then vault like some dead-fall through the air.

"Superb ! Magnificent storm !" exclaimed he. "Jove's artillery seems to wage a war *à l'outrance* ! Superb ! Superb !" He stood holding the curtains

outspread as he gazed up to the lowering storm-beblazoned heaven in admiration of the maddened element. Involuntarily he repeated from his never-failing favourite, in rather a dramatic tone :—

“ ‘ Now storming fury rose,
And clamour, such as heard in heaven till now
Was never ; arms on armour clashing brayed
Horrible discord, and the maddening wheels
Of brazen chariots raged ; dire was the noise
Of conflict ; overhead the dismal hiss
Of fiery darts in flaming volleys flew,
And flying vaulted either host with fire,
So under fiery cope together rushed
Both battles main, with ruinous assault
And inextinguishable rage. All heaven
Resounded ; and had earth been there, all earth
Had to her centre shook.’ ”

He opened the window, and stood upon the balcony, the rain dashing into his face, the wind snorting about him like a water dragon. It seemed to accord with his humour. However, he was driven to hasty retreat. Whilst securing the window fastenings and spreading the curtain, he finished the quotation :—

“ ‘ Deeds of eternal fame
Were done, but infinite : for wide was spread
A standing fight ; then soaring on main wing,
Tormenting all the air ; all air seemed then
Conflicting fire.’ ”

He sat some moments engrossed in thought before resuming his task. His countenance gaining

an expression of thoughtful concentration, became in the end deeply troubled. His retrospective mood, incited by reviewing his private papers, recalled a host of heart-breaking reminiscences that he would gladly have obliterated eternally from his consciousness. With a long drawn sigh his thoughts culminated in a determined purpose.

What use to hold and keep documentary evidences, which some day might so readily be misconstrued, and certainly, in event of his death, would beyond contravention, breed all manner of undesirable ideas, to torture poor innocent Clarisse? . . . He wrought himself into the conviction that he had indisputably transgressed, even had passively sinned against the writer of all these treasured letters he now pondered over, by his selfish tardiness in destroying them long ago. He concluded to amend his sin of omission by destroying at once every vestige of the compromising testimony therein contained.

A testimony, taken all in all, viewed from a point of outlook which commanded the entire premises—the actuating circumstances—the pros and cons—resulting in a charitable and most merciful verdict. To the contrary, taken from an extraneous view, apart from sympathy or personal consideration, the judgment necessarily must be harsh and condemnatory, blotting the fair repute of the woman, damning his own manliness.

He scrupled no longer. No more haggling between sentiment and duty. The papers should be

all, all, destroyed by one fell swoop. Not one solitary scrap should be left to betray or compromise the dead or the living. He would take no more chances by an unwarrantable self-indulgence of sentiment. No, no, his child's happiness should henceforth be his first consideration.

Notwithstanding all his resolutions he struggled, despite himself, to conquer his whilom sentiment, as he fingered over and contemplated the delicately inscribed sheets of paper redolent with sandalwood, the dainty old-fashioned embossed envelopes, cut at the ends to preserve the device of the seals, bearing foreign postmarks and far away dates; so far away, and yet now, whilst he viewed them, his entire past life seemed to vividly cycle through the most unfrequented avenues of memory, and become as of the present.

A withered flower, pressed, brittle, and discoloured, but retaining a vague suggestion of its former perfume, floated to the floor from atween the letter pages. His lips quivered, his hands dropped upon his knees, clutching convulsively these confessional winding-sheets of dead hopes, dead loves, perished flowers.

How he hung upon these trifling instigators of memory, just as if he dreaded to pluck the thorns out from his soul where they had festered, where he had hidden them with miserly jealousy for so many sorrowful years. . . . They were sacred horrors, guarded from the profaning sight of mortals with reverential idolatry. . . . To discard

them appeared almost to betoken inconstancy, as well as a species of sacrilege.

Lamentable and lamenting sturdy man of sound common sense faltering in this wise, when he had concluded as to the rights of the case. . . . Why procrastinate? This was the accepted hour. Were his sentiments betraying him into fresh irresolutions?

Suddenly, as a man who had gathered himself to close invincibly with an enemy, he was at last ready for action.

Crumpling up a handful of letters taken promiscuously from the lot, he lit a taper and set fire to them. His expression, his nervous clutch, implied the exercise of unusual will-power in this immolation. Every nerve quivered in a dumb agony, as he held the crackling, crinkling, smoking mass, and guarded the flames. The devouring, licking tongues of fire, lapped with appetite, curled about, charring and blackening into ragged bits the twisted paper. Every now and anon the lurid transparency of the consumed tissue revealed vivid tracings of the writing caused by the fusion of the ink. Boldly, in phosphorescent hue, as the spectre of the written thoughts would loom up, clearly decipherable, the words, the charmed words, "*darling*," "*forgiveness*," "*Herbert*," "*love*," "*death*," then fragmentary parts of words twined like tendrils through the flames, finally, as though self-consumed by their own ardour, they would fade, to be lost for ever to mortal sight, to mortal ken.

These burning letters rekindled in his soul the old hatred for De La Rue, restimulated an unquenched thirst to avenge the wrongs done his dead, his sacrificed wife, and put himself right in the eyes of his accusing daughter. He was stirred by strange, desperate resolves. His soul was quickened alike by love and hate. His oath seemed holy.

The fierce, tempestuous storm without, the rattling, blaring thunder, the blaze of smiting and smitten lightning shafts, the downpouring of unpent torrents, suddenly released from sundered clouds, were not more furious than the terrible mortal rage which agitated him.

The last bunch of letters burned, he drew from his breast pocket the square ominous document he had given Dick to read, containing his wife's dying confession. Force of habit when he saw it, prompted as a stage cue his usual quotation:—

“Meanwhile, the heinous and spiteful act
Of Satan done in Paradise
. Was known
In Heaven.”

He resolutely burnt this also. Nothing but tell-taleless ashes remained. All was done save the one deed, the crucial deed—the penalty requiring De La Rue's life, or the forfeiture of his own—the fulfilment of his oath.

Blackstone's precepts, known to him by heart, appeared utterly devoid of applicability in his case. His case was eminently one in which his own

convictions must rule, despite the inflexibility of criminal law. There were no circumstantial evidences, no extenuating circumstances, nothing but remorseless, wicked design on the part of De La Rue to spread ruin, to destroy not only his happiness, but to sully the fair name of his adored wife. The law, however, takes no true cognizance of the heart-break pain endured by the outraged victim, neither is there any legal measure of restitution it can dole out to allay the sickening ache which gnaws beneath the surface like a canker, whilst life and memory last. Plutarch could not have been wise in the dilemma of like woe.

Once again he perused De La Rue's note, and burned that too. He opened the letter he had written in response to con its contents, apprehensive that he might have written indiscreetly. After scanning it, he exclaimed with satisfaction :

"There, that's terse enough. Rather awkward to appoint an interview in one's own house to meet an arch-enemy, yet it precluded eavesdroppers. I must guard against any overt act, at least while he is here. But I'll warn him most explicitly, there shall be no misunderstanding as to what are my intentions. Then he must look out for himself. It will be war on sight afterward, war *à l'outrance*." So he mused.

Without, the storm continued with unabated violence ; the wind rose higher and higher, till all space was filled with deep significant rumbling and ear-splitting shrieks, as it rebelliously traversed at a crazy velocity the town !

A sudden gust ! One of the windows facing the garden burst open with a crash !

Herbert Severance sprang forward to close it. The curtain was rudely cast aside. There stood Count De La Rue ! Dripping wet, bearing the aspect of some eldritch demon of the elements who had ridden on the untamed hurricane to do some unholy deed. There he stood, enveloped in a long domino, unexpected, unannounced, unwelcomed.

With the alertness of a cat, he closed the window behind him, before Herbert Severance had recovered his presence of mind, and dropped his wet cloak and hat in a heap to the floor, revealing a casket he carried strapped to his hip.

"Well, sir ! How dare you intrude here unbidden, like a murderous thief in the middle of the night ?" demanded Herbert Severance in a deprecatory indignant manner, as he doubled his fist to strike.

"Patience, monsieur, patience ! Because I dare *revancher* a wrong ! Because I have the courage of the devil !" hotly replied De La Rue as he warded off the blow. "Monsieur Severance, I beg you control your wrath, it will be mostly to your interest to hear me out. I came to the back door without my card, *pas d'étiquette*, because I thought you did not know your own good." Herbert Severance was waxing furious, yet the Frenchman kept on in his insinuating way. "And that you premeditated a refusal to my request. Monsieur Severance, believe me I could not go back to *La belle France*

denied this interview. I could not go back without giving to you for *la petite* these souvenirs." He stretched out his hand proffering the casket he had meanwhile unloosened, but Herbert Severance angrily knocked it to the floor. "Pardon, Monsieur, the souvenirs are *her mother's*."

At these words Herbert Severance started, intent upon picking up the casket, but De La Rue put his foot upon it, and sneeringly said, drawing from his belt a glittering dagger:

"Not so fast, Monsieur, you are not exactly polite."

Herbert Severance thus thwarted, bit his lips and settled back upon his heels. The Frenchman tossed the dagger upon the wet trickling heap made by his cloak.

"Well, Monsieur Severance, I have to discharge a sacred behest, I pledged my honour —"

"*Your honour!*" contemptuously hissed out Herbert Severance; "monstrous!"

"Yes, Monsieur, *my honour*," retorted the Frenchman, whilst his face twitched in anger. "You must acknowledge every man has his own accepted code of honour—"

"Silence!" yelled Herbert Severance, clenching the fists of his upraised arms, as if he would beat the man down, but restraining himself from an actual assault. "Silence, coward! thief!"

"Stay, Monsieur, cool your words, or I may think I am in the jungle, and will not be responsible for my actions in my own defence. Your abuse, Mon-

sieur, has a *beau contrepoint* in your own tardy vindication of *your honour*," sneered De La Rue. "*Parbleu*, Monsieur, you only made madam the prey of chance by your own negligence."

At these words, once more Herbert Severance lifted his hands to smite De La Rue, and stepped towards him.

The devilish spirit animating the Frenchman, who remained outrageously self-possessed and calm, seemed to stay the impending blow. He never winced, but hissed between his teeth as he gesticulated—

"I challenge you before *tout le monde* to defend yourself against my charge. *Oui*, Monsieur, you permitted your *petite fille* to remain *my pupil*—*my pupil*!—all these long years. *Mon Dieu*! Monsieur, just think of it; you left her without making for yourself the trouble to ask a single question,—left her to the instruction and the *evil* influence of her mother's lover! To me! to me! Dare you deny this?"

De La Rue stood as one on unexpugnable grounds, fearlessly, audaciously defiant, while Herbert Severance's head bowed lower and lower. He clutched the back of a chair to steady himself; the import of the taunting, cruel words dawned upon him. He cringed beneath the impious, villainous, odious words, yet they were, on the face, absolutely true.

"*Voilà*! Monsieur, I do not come here to flaunt in your teeth the *drapeau rouge*," resumed De La

Rue, in a tantalizing tone. The wind rushed in through the broken glass, and lifted the curtain high in the air. "*Voici!* Monsieur, the elements are having a pitiless battle; let us be more tranquil."

"Very well; let us end this wretched business as soon as possible," subjoined Mr Severance, closing the inner wooden blinds to exclude the wind.

Meantime, De La Rue picked up the casket, and crossing the room, placed it upon the desk. He quickly opened the lid, displaying a collection of jewels—rather sacrificial stones. Seeing these, Herbert Severance staggered to a chair, like one stunned and helpless to resist the ferocity of a savage brute, who was burying its venomous fangs deep in some vital part.

De La Rue's eyes caught sight of the paperweight always on Severance's desk, and drew back in surprise. It was the counterpart of one in the jewel-box.

"*Plus extraordinaire!*" muttered he, as he lifted the paperweight from the desk, momentarily lost to another person's presence, and closely inspected the article. "*Oui, oui, la même chose, par exemple, la même devise 'Amor Omnia Vincit' la même date.*" He now took the fellow paperweight from the casket, and placed it side by side with the other, in full view. His Latin inquisitiveness now in full swing, he looked vaguely at Herbert Severance, spoke, but not to him:

"Strange, very strange! She assured me this paper-weight"—he touched the one just taken out of the casket—"was cast out of some silver coins received as her last fee, at her farewell appearance as a professional in opera."

His imagination was busy weaving his sackcloth. The coincidence dictated the idea that *he* had been deceived by *the woman* whom he had so cruelly duped and heartlessly outraged. It was diamond cut diamond.

"*She, she*, then, made a dupe of me!" He spoke the words intoned by the accusation of one suddenly finding himself betrayed.

Herbert Severance looked up at these words. Seeing De La Rue holding the paper-weight, he became furious through indignation. His tongue was paralysed, and his lips refused for the moment to articulate, he fairly glared at De La Rue.

"How dare you touch that, you infamous scoundrel!" he managed to utter in a laboured way, and wrenched the paper-weight out of De La Rue's hands.

But the Frenchman was so self-absorbed in his own cogitations, he neither heeded the words, nor did he seem to notice the roughness employed to gain possession of the article.

Just at this juncture the fire-bells clanged out boisterously. Jove's flying fire-lances havoced some edifice. The fire-brigade rushed, yelling, pell-mell through the street past the house, the horses dashing wildly in answer to the warning

call. Both men looked at one another. For the moment their thoughts were diverted by the extraneous confusion and hub-bub from their solemn mood.

This outside incident was the little vagrant grain that happened to allow of a breathing spell at the right moment, and to relax the stress which had resistlessly swayed them in a hazardous manner.

Mr Severance stepped briskly to the window. As it faced on the garden, nothing could be seen. He turned quickly, evidently intent on passing through the hall to the breakfast-room, but, on second thought, halted at the door, wheeled around, and came back to his chair, saying to himself:

“What difference where the fire is, my house is safe.”

Meanwhile De La Rue had employed the brief moments in laying out upon the desk the contents of the upper tray of the casket.

“Count De La Rue, let us understand one another at once,” coldly and dryly said Mr Severance.

“*Très bien, Monsieur, très bien*, that is my supreme desire,” interpolated De La Rue.

“Then let us proceed with your business. And that you may not complain of foul play, I tell you now, on *my oath before God and man*, I intend to kill you the next time we stand face to face, or, be killed by you.”

The words were spoken with unfaltering deliberation, and not with passionate vigour; they were weighed and tempered to lend their full significance,

as the proper vehicles of an uncompromising determination.

The Frenchman, dissembling any astonishment, rose to his feet, bowed in the most affected manner.

"*Mon Dieu*, Monsieur, you are polite. I did not flatter myself you would be so considerate for me." His lips curled in an irritating expression of supercilious contempt. "Life to me, Monsieur, is not worth one *sou*, but it is the nature of the Frenchman to defend himself *a l'outrance*. *Par exemple*, Monsieur, I am a Frenchman, and as an old swordsman of the gymnasium, I must be pardoned if I cannot forget my skill to oblige a friend who wishes to kill me without resistance, *n'est ce pas?*"

"This is frivolous, sir," impatiently said Mr Severance, "let us proceed seriously."

"*Oui, oui, Monsieur*, it is *léger*, or, as you say, *frivolous*. Monsieur, I agree; let us advance to our affairs." These last words were uttered with somewhat sadness, and over his face flitted a softening thought of something, which transformed the speaker even to Herbert Severance's eyes.

"I agree, Count De La Rue, for every hindrance prolonging this interview is apparently painful for us both."

"In the first place, to do me justice, Monsieur Severance, you must consider that I am a Frenchman, reared with certain ideas of love, of women, of life, in general of *tout le monde*. My temperament, social view, and entire existence is founded upon

national characteristics, and the accepted *habitude* of society in my own country. My estimate of woman's responsibility, of her *personnel*, of her approachability or her impossible seclusion, are not exceptionally mine, but veritably national, they are like every other Frenchman's. *Par exemple*, a woman once married is no longer innocent in the eyes of the world respecting the temptations and vices existent. She is after marriage immeasurably a free agent. She is no longer *girl*, but *woman*. . . . Then, also, you must know, Monsieur, that most all artistes are supposed by Frenchmen to have a certain laxity, freedom, or what you will, in regard to the stricter proprieties which obtain in what is appelled by the English the *straight-laced upper ten*. *Au contraire*, in the *monde Boheme* among painters and literati and artistes there exists a code of their own. They are a law unto themselves. They follow alike according to their own taste, or make a detour in conformity with their chances or circumstances. Amongst the artistic guilds, as all are credited with more than ordinary intelligence, all are supposed to view life on a broad plane; all, so to speak, assume the attitude of experts, or adepts as you might call them. . . . Each respects the other's affairs. Scarcely ever is there a violation on this score. This is not *une façon de parler*. This is French. This is the *debonnaire* manner of the veritable artistic Bohemian. . . . Pardon this seeming digression, but, Monsieur,

I am forced to state this to you in defence of my own course. . . . I thought, and justifiably, too, with reason from my *point de vue*, that Mademoiselle Arditte was like other artistes. I had every reason to believe she was your mistress! . . ."

"Stop! infamous wretch!" yelled Herbert Severance, as he sprang up and seized De La Rue by the throat, "or, by *heaven*, I'll strangle you!"

De La Rue disengaged himself from his adversary with considerable difficulty.

"Pardon, Monsieur, there seems to be a little misunderstanding. I thought," he touched his forehead with his finger in a quizzical way, "I thought that you agreed to my proposition to hear my story? Pardon, pardon, Monsieur, I assure you I am very content in silence. My own knowledge suffices me. You are at liberty to remain in obscurity, *n'importe!*" He essayed to take his leave, saying, as he stooped down to gather up his cloak and dagger, "Monsieur, the contents of that casket were gifts and souvenirs entrusted to me by *Madam*. The letters are mine." Tossing his still dripping cloak across his arm, he stepped back to the desk, pressed on a spring in the casket, and one side of it dropped down revealing a packet of letters which he took out and thrust into the flame of the taper yet burning on the table, "and they can be well spared from your family archives, Monsieur."

Herbert Severance was dumbfounded. He frantically tried to snatch the burning papers, but to no avail ; De La Rue held them far above his head, exclaiming with sardonic exultation when they were beyond redemption :

"Monsieur, too late. But I have pulled the jewel *de la boue* ! With one exception, there are none of her letters written to me extant, and that one will go with me to the grave." The papers were all reduced to ashes. Turning to Herbert Severance with mock gallantry, "Monsieur, I salute you, *bonne nuit* !" he proceeded to lift the curtain.

"Don't go ! for God's sake, don't go !" gasped out Herbert Severance.

"*Parbleu* ! Monsieur, I decline, with your permission, taking the chance of your amusing yourself by garrotting me. It is not polite, Monsieur ; especially after you have promised so soon to kill me, I must decline."

"Count De La Rue, on my word as a gentleman, I assure you, if you will briefly summarize the story, I will listen passively. You are a man, you have loved, surely you must know what a struggle my soul is engaged in ?" He outstretched his hands towards De La Rue in his pleading.

"Monsieur Severance, on second thought I will comply, provided you will make no further scenes." He once more threw his cloak upon the floor close by the window, but thrust his dagger into his belt.

Both men sat down. Herbert Severance clasped

his hands resolutely, and firmly set his teeth, as if putting himself in mental chancery.

“Monsieur, your assertion of marriage to Mlle. Arditte was always to my mind a specious guise to genteelly mask a relation that was not *à la mode*, or permissible in America, as on the continent. Mlle. Arditte’s career and success, as well as her beauty, made her, as you well knew at the time, the recipient of much, very much admiration and flattery. With veritable feminine spirit and natural inclination she liked it, *pas sa faute*. . . . You secluded her before she was satiated with the world, before the footlights had dimmed in her eyes. . . . Monsieur, pardon a criticism, but you were a *laïque*, and indifferent to the requirements in her artistic nature; her thirst, her hunger, her longing for artificial things, for the light, bright, dazzling show, *éclat*, and witchery of her theatric life. It was your misfortune, Monsieur, as well perhaps as hers. Poor inexperienced child-woman, she did not know herself. *Voilà!* I did know her. I profited by my insight to win her from you.”

Herbert Severance involuntarily threw his hands out.

“Pardon, Monsieur, you must be tranquil. Her subtle charms so fresh, fragrant of the *printemps*, were, I confess, the fact irresistible, *très ravissant*. Soon I discovered that she was not earth-earthy, but a spirituelle, lovely refined woman above the level of her class.—Pardon, Monsieur, but to a Frenchman all women are of a class.—Day by day I

found that I, a worldly blazé man, was becoming veritably entailed by this pure, guileless child-woman. I was maddened against fate—jealous of you—you, Monsieur, whom I regarded as inconsiderate and unworthy of this charming *mignonne*, because of your blindness. . . .”

“You are not called upon, sir, to criticise my actions,” savagely interrupted Herbert Severance.

“But, Monsieur, the story hangs upon these little impressions. After the birth of *la petite*, I thought I would call to my succour all my reserve manliness, all my sense of honour, insomuch as you had entrusted me with this sacred devoir—*noblesse oblige*. Monsieur, I concluded to leave at once. *Mon Dieu!* now the trial came. Madam had become attached to me; for you know, Monsieur, I nominally had substituted you, in your absence, by my kind ministrations during her illness, and she now made claim upon me. *Mon Dieu!* Monsieur, believe me or not, I tried with all my force to be honest to you; but the struggle was with her, as well as with my own heart. The constant companionship, which was but natural whilst living by the side of this lovely woman, rendered me powerless to resist, when she protested that she could not live without me. . . . In a fit of despondency, occasioned by my positive avowal that I should at once relinquish the devoir, and betake myself to some foreign country, twice she vowed to kill herself. . . . My courage failed. . . . I called for advice upon a capable abbé. I talked the case

over in complete confidence, without the slightest disguise in any particular. He frankly advised me to fully and freely communicate the state of affairs to you without delay. . . . Unfortunately, I was not sufficiently without blame. I could not evade the one fact, that I had endeavoured in the past to win madam from her allegiance to you, because, Monsieur, I thought you were a *hypocrite*. . . . Lack of courage hindered. Possibly—I confess to the sin—the egotistic thought that I had the finesse to adjust all my own shortcomings, and compromise the situation, so as to avoid criminating either her or myself, and yet not be forced to resort to extreme measures, which would eventuate in a rupture. . . .

“By degrees she traversed singular conditions of remorse and recrimination. . . . I occupied her with occultisms and mysticisms, for which, Monsieur, you had such a *penchant*.”

Herbert Severance winced, but made no protest ; he was lapsing into an apparent state of immobility. De La Rue took an outrageous delight now and again in thus stabbing him. The only words he pronounced were “Go on, sir.”

“*Merci*, Monsieur, *merci*, I will ‘go on.’ The savant cults permitted me great scope to mislead her. I made her believe that she was peculiarly endowed, and that she could with application attain great eminence as a mystic. . . . Meanwhile, I experienced an aggrievance against you. A rebellious, bitter hatred moved me to avenge myself

upon you. I could not credit that you were only as a passive instrument in the hands of fate. Your continued absences prompted me to believe, and to instil the idea into madam's mind, that your affections were, without a doubt, centred elsewhere; that you lacked in manliness, preferring to lead a life of duplicity, rather than free her from an empty claim upon you as her husband, and give her her freedom, and thus afford me the coveted opportunity to possess her in the eyes of the law; for I avow I would have made her my wife. *Ma foi!* I believed this to be exactly true. As a Frenchman, I could not possibly assign any other motive for your most extraordinary conduct in consenting to indulge in such lengthy absences. It seemed you must be indifferent to madam's happiness and her deportment,—either that, or you were mad to tamper thus with your own peace and happiness. Monsieur, it was sheer folly to defy a woman's love with such cruel tests of constancy. Did it ever occur to you that she was human, young, susceptible, amenable to tenderness, and likely to yield to the constant devotion of any person?"

No answer came, for Herbert Severance had settled deeper and deeper into profound abstraction, and was heedless of all interrogations.

"Monsieur, in justice to me," De La Rue continued, "in justice to the dead,"—involuntarily he crossed his breast,—“allow me to assure you, that she only forgot her vows to you, after I played upon her credulity in the mysterious promulgation of

unknown cults. I thought to eventually win her *tout à fait* by subterfuges. But no, to my mortification I confess it, that from the moment she realised the duplicity with which she had been betrayed, her complete nature was transformed."

A shadowy smile spread over Herbert Severance's face at these words.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed.

"Voilà! instead of the gentle, capricious, mobile woman, *au contraire* now, she never ceased berating me and accusing herself. She gave utterance to such passionate wails of remorse, I thought betimes her reason would become dethroned. *Mon Dieu! Monsieur, it was terrible!* And I, *pauvre diable*, could but bow submissively. Let me explain, that the false report of the death of *la petite* I was excessively averse should be sent to you, but Madam would not listen to any other than this bizarre course. She charged me on my most solemn oath to secrecy. . . . Finally, consumed by the humiliating knowledge that all was hopelessly lost for me in regard to her, *le bon Dieu me pardonne!*"—he crossed himself again,—“I sought, as a Frenchman, to amuse myself—”

“*For God's sake, man, don't tempt me!*” burst out Herbert Severance. His face was livid; he had listened as one petrified until De La Rue used the unfortunate word “*amuse*.”

De La Rue realised he had strained a dangerous point, but he was intent upon telling his story at all hazard.

"Very well, Monsieur. I tried to appease my wounded pride, my repulsed overtures, my baffled hope, by exercising my influence over her, despite her unsilenced avowals of hatred and increasing contempt."

These words soothed Herbert Severance, as, indeed, did every intimation of his wife's purity of nature. He did not try to repress his feelings.

"Merciful God, be praised!" he exclaimed with true thankfulness.

"Monsieur, the devil incarnate prompted me to the heartless *sang-froid* of an inquisitor. I tormented her! Execrable fate! By spells I could have eaten out my heart, I so compassionated her agonised soul, her estrangement, her loneliness. Her acute imagination ever magnified her faults, *une mille fois*. . . . Finally, she forbade me her presence. Nothing could waive her decision. I *was desolate*. . . . She sickened—no mortal malady, other than hopeless remorse—and died,"—he crossed himself,—“as you know, cursing me!”

He was much affected, and Herbert Severance impulsively stretched his hand out towards him.

"My hand, Count De La Rue. You have made me ineffably happy. I thank you, I sincerely thank you!"

With his habitual irony Count de la Rue closed his hand, extending only his little finger, and touched the great-hearted man's generous palm.

"Monsieur is emotional," he vouchsafed with mockery. "Well, to proceed, after our duel I vowed

eternal fidelity to *la petite Clarisse*. *Pour quoi?* To protect her from evil. To protect her from men of my own sort. I effectually intrigued with the Lady Superior of the convent where she was guarded. In fine, I became *la petite's* tutor for languages and music, from the tenderest age when she began to babble, until—ah, misery—she left to voyage to you. But even then I did not lose sight of her. . . . Monsieur! Monsieur! you can never *love her* as devotedly and with the abnegation that I have. And yet you have miserably alienated her from me. I know it well. It is not just. . . .” His voice had grown tremulous. “That casket was entrusted to me during *de jours heureux* by madam, as a dot for *la petite*. I know she is soon to marry. . . . Monsieur Severance, I have never believed that you were legally wedded to Clarisse Arditte. Once, when exasperated by the information that *la petite* was to go to you, I asked a confrere of your nephew’s, whether you were married, or had ever been. He took measures to ascertain, and after careful research, discovered no evidence in the affirmative, and stoutly repudiated the idea. . . . Monsieur, the old hate lurked in my heart. I thought I could not give up to any person living, but much less to *you*,” he hissed these words out, his eyes dancing in his excitement, “the adored *la petite*, who was so considerable to me; she over whom I had watched vigilantly, even jealously, for eighteen years. No, no, not to *you*, who had been negligent, indifferent, and remiss in manifesting

common interest, even for her physical welfare ! In revenge, to secure for me an ally, I told Monsieur Jasper Rodgers that *your illegitimate daughter . . .*”

Without a single word Herbert Severance seized his silver paper weight and struck the speaker a murderous blow on the temple !

De La Rue endeavoured to rise to his feet, fell forward lifeless on the floor, whilst Herbert Severance was in the act of wielding another blow.

A deafening clap of thunder burst, a vivid flash of lightning ! the house was struck !

Herbert Severance was struck dead ! Both sinners, one noble, the other ignoble, lay stark and dead, with their hearts' secrets locked beyond the prying of mortal sight, beyond malignant divulgement ; both men summoned to enter forthwith the realm of God, and receive their just sentence before the highest tribunal.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BEREAVEMENT.

“ Alas ! both for the deed and the cause !
But have I not seen Death ? Is this the way
I must turn to native dust ? O ! sight
Of terror foul and ugly to behold,
Horrid to think, how horrid to feel ! ”

A PPALLED through fright the servants were unable to stir from their rooms after the fatal bolt. . . . Neighbours, in dangerous proximity to the doomed house, raised a terror-stricken uproar. The din and commotion of rapidly arriving fire-brigades and insurance patrolmen filled the air with dire confusion.

Fortunately the lightning-struck dwelling was not fired. Sulphurous odours poured through the broken doors and shattered windows, caused by the electric discharge ; and darkness reigned to awe the beholders.

“ Is anybody hurt ? ” was cried out on all sides. A group of men carrying lanterns proceeded to make instant search over the premises. Servants gradually made their appearance, protesting, to all questions, that they had heard nothing until the crash came, and were then dazed out of their wits.

"Who is in the house beside you servants?" demanded the captain of the insurance patrol.

"God be blessed!" gasped out Jones, "me mastur wuz a-writtin in the library when he ordered me to bed!"

A rush was made to research the library, for the men upon first entering the house had only glanced hastily into the downstairs rooms, and, discovering no evidences of occupancy or of fire, they had forthwith ascended to the chambers, consistently supposing at this hour the occupants would be in bed, and might require assistance.

Here lay the two implacable foes dead! seared by the terrific shaft which had shaken the granite edifice from foundation to roof.

What did it mean?

"Some mysterious judgment," thought the dread-embraced servants, who, true to their superstition, crossed themselves as they involuntarily mumbled a prayer for the souls of the dead. It was the will of God to their beclouded reasoning.

The presence of the stranger dead alongside their master caused them great perplexity. Not one of their number knew this man, and there prevailed complete ignorance on their part as to how or when he had effected his entrance.

The wet cloak on the floor by the unbolted window, and the muddy foot-tracks, indicated his entrance from the garden side. The charred papers, the jewels scattered in disorder, the dagger

in his belt, suggested that he was a thief who had surprised the master of the house.

"Where is the rest of the family? asked the captain.

"The young ladies and Master Dick, sur, are away attending a weddin' at New Rochelle." promptly replied Jones.

"They must be telegraphed for at once," said a sergeant of police who had been summoned. "Nothing must be touched, however, until the coroner comes, as the men are both dead."

Proper and trusty men were detailed to patrol the house, and guard against sneak thieves, who find scenes of disaster their most profitable resorts. Notifications were despatched to the chief of police and to the coroner, and the street was formally barriered.

Gradually the storm spent its fury, dying down, only now and again a low, far away muttering of thunder was distinguishable. Daylight began to break, and in its paleness imparted a grim, unearthly aspect to the immediate surroundings of the disaster.

Four flurried, alert, smooth-faced news-blazers, with keen noses for news, appeared, pad and pencil in hand, eager for the first items of the shocking calamity. It was a race between the representatives of *The World*, *The Sun*, *The Times*, and *The Herald*, to interview, if possible, the victims, dead or alive. The lateness of the occurrence, in fact, after the morning papers had

left the press, would necessitate *an extra*, therefore they agreed between themselves to pool the facts, each recounting for his own journal the sum and substance according to his own light.

They fairly itched to furnish copy to warrant blood and thunder, sensational head-lines, in caps. "A SUSPECTED TRAGEDY IN HIGH LIFE!" "OMINOUS ABSENCE OF MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY!" "CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE MOST CONDEMNATORY!" "SUSPICION PROVOKED BY THE STUBBORN ASSUMPTION OF IGNORANCE ON THE PART OF THE SERVANTS!"

"Deuce take it!" disappointedly exclaimed sensational reporter fiend No. 1, "how in the Dickens are we to dodge the lightning?"

"Bother exactitude! We're not historians," said No. 2.

"Follow in evening's issue the apocryphal, giving details of later and fuller investigations," offered, suggestively, No. 3, who was an old war correspondent.

"That's the tidy ticket, old man; your head's level," exclaimed No. 4, snapping his fingers with delight.

"EX-TRA-A! EX-TRA-A-A! TRAGEDY IN HIGH LIFE! DOUBLE MURDER! UNPARALLELED IN ANNALS OF CRIME! MYSTERIOUS ABSENCE OF FAMILY! EX-TRA-A! EX-TRA-A!" bellowed loud and hurriedly the paper-boys, the words jolting out, as running hither and thither, they scoured the entire town, to

announce the inkling of a distorted disaster, and vend the cruel sensational fabrication.

New York was agog over the breakfast news. A rush was made for the extras, sold at a premium. Windows were thrown wide with a bang, and men in shirt-sleeves, sometimes faces belathered, yelled on high: "Boy! boy! hist! here! Paper!" Ladies stood bare-headed on their door-steps, beckoning for the newsmongers.

What avidity show mortals, one and all, for knowledge of their neighbour's crime or misfortunes!

Opinions of all sorts were rife. Individuals who had long closeted social miffs against this particular family, now unsparingly aired their anathemas. . . . Ventilated petty spite in slurring remarks. . . . Human tongues were busy, but not with pity.

One little upstart,—Fanfaron that he was—announced his opinion with a flourish:

"Bad lot! Old adage verified—'birds of a feather, &c., &c.' Egad! 'tis perfectly sickening. Why, only last week, Jasper Rodgers—one of the same clique—broke his precious neck by falling over the hotel railing when blind drunk. I tell you they're a bad lot!"

A good old gentleman tried to check this loud-mouthed youth, by trenchantly asking, "Young man, how do you account for the lightning?"

"Great Cæsar! that's deliciously funny," he scoffingly retorted. "Nobody but a chuckle-headed muff would be idiotic enough to credit the *canard*

that lightning played any part in that murder ! I tell you, my venerable friend, they're posers ! A theatric lot, root and branch, with their fiddle-faddle. Not one of them ever known to do the slightest thing, without studying effect. You see, they couldn't arrange a calcium light, so the lightning was utilized." Then, assuming a patronizing tone : " You amaze me, Mr Sage, I thought you, of all men, were head and shoulders above such weak-kneed pandering to any one ; especially above trying to cover up the iniquities of any man, by prating the will of God."

This cub settled back with a self-satisfied air after his tirade, puffed up with the vain-glorious notion that his *smartness* had put a quietus on " that old duffer, Sage ;" whereas, the high-bred, old-schooled gentleman deplored the youth's senseless, outrageous impertinence, and maintained silence, disgusted beyond words.

Hearing the news, Mr and Mrs Bleecker proceeded in amazement, without delay to Mr Severance's house. Under the stricture of the law, they, as others, were denied entrance, until the proper authorities should have taken thorough cognizance of the situation. As they loitered in the neighbourhood, in expectation of the arrival of Clarisse, Edith, and Dick, they were driven nigh to distraction by the surly, sinister, insinuating *on dits*, which flew like arrows from the common herd that flocked like sheep, to curiously view, with morbid interest, the site of the calamity.

Mrs Bleecker could not refrain from expressions of scorching indignity concerning the bare-faced calumnies. She was most solicitous for Clarisse, and could not reconcile herself to the thought that without proper warning she would be brought face to face with the tragic event in all its awfulness.

"It will be such a terrific shock, and a frightful strain upon the dear child's highly sensitive organisation. I declare I fear hazardous results. In any event, Algernon, we must insist that both the girls come home with us until this uproar calms down," said she to Mr Bleecker.

"Certainly, Rachel, it's the only thing for them to do," approvingly subjoined Mr Bleecker. "I hope Dick and Clarisse will not be dragged into court, in the adjustment of this mysterious business. Doubtless Mr Severance was too clear-headed a lawyer not to keep his affairs as straight as a string. You see, Rachel, the awkward thing is this inexplicable presence of the other man—both dead—no known witness. My conscience, it is a puzzler!"

Just then a carriage swung around the corner in view, the horses, driven at full speed, were reined up with great difficulty, long enough for the cordon to be lowered to permit it to draw up before Mr Severance's dwelling.

Mr Bleecker called out to Dick as he alighted, caught him by the arm, expostulating in an undertone :

"Drysedale, don't for heaven's sake permit Clarisse to enter before you have made at least a

cursory inspection. It is too horrible ! don't, pray don't."

Clarisse, followed by Edith, jumped out of the carriage and confronted Mr Bleecker with pallid countenance, and in a cold, firm voice accosted him :

" Mr Bleecker, it is my duty to go to my father if he is in trouble. Nothing can hinder me." Seeing at a glance by the strangeness of everybody, and everything, that something she could not fathom had occurred, she stiffly drew herself up to her full height, and with determination which would suffer no brooking, added in a solemn clear tone :

" If his life is in danger, more than for any other reason, then should I, his daughter, be promptly at his side." With tears in her eyes, she grasped Dick's arm, and amid the cruel prying of all that throng they quickly passed within the dwelling.

Jones stood with down-bowed head, awaiting their entrance. He plucked Dick's coat-skirt and cautiously whispered :

" Mistur Dick, for the luv of the blessed Virgin, don't tak the young missus into the library. Mastur's dead, sur !" This announcement gave Dick a start ; he turned to Edith, who was close upon his heels, and said with decision :

" You and Clarisse, go to Mr Severance's room and wait for me."

Clarisse instinctively felt that this was a subterfuge to hide some vague mystery, and rebelliously broke out :

"Dick, for mercy sake, don't keep me in suspense! What are all these strange people here for? Where is my father? Tell me! tell me!"

Evasion was of no use. She had broken away from Dick and Edith, and darted straight to the library door. Fortunately it did not slide back freely, and the momentary delay afforded Dick ample time to reach her side. With gentle, but incontrovertible firmness, he drew her aside.

"Clarisse, wait until I have first seen the condition of things." Still she resisted. "I promise not to withhold from you the very worst, only you *must* be reasonable, and wait a moment."

"No, no! Dick, I cannot. It will kill me. It is I who must first see, and know the worst at once. Let me pass, or come with me, *for nothing can deter me!*" She was transfigured into a fearless determined woman, whom no one could have mustered the necessary brutal courage to desist.

The door slid back, the portiere drooped before her, she cast it impetuously aside, and stepped deliberately into the room, escorted by Dick. She walked straight over to the two long forms prone upon the floor, covered with two white coverlids.

"Who is the other?" she drily asked the officer on guard, her eyes roving all the time over the disordered room, insensibly taking note of every detail. The man failed to respond. In marked astonishment she repeated, "Who is the other?" Her peremptory tone evoked a prompt reply:

"For the present unknown, Miss."

"If that be the case, I will see." She drew aside simultaneously both coverlids, revealing the discoloured visages.

Not a moan, not one word escaped her. As if her hands had frozen to the linen she clutched, and she had become paralysed through terror, she remained as motionless as the corpses, and as immobile as marble. An instantaneous resolution had enthralled her soul. Whatever struggle she maintained within, there was not a vestige of emotional betrayal to those who eyed her with breathless apprehension.

Finally she rose, saying, without a tremor in her voice, "How merciless God has been to me and mine." Then, as if some new consciousness had lifted the veil for a moment from the mystery: "Perhaps it is well." With deprecation she impatiently turned to those present. "What are you waiting for? Why is not my father properly disposed upon his bed, and the room set to rights?"

The coroner's deputy spoke up:

"Nothing must be disturbed, Miss, before the coroner has taken his evidence."

"What!" she exclaimed in dismay. "When a man in his own house is struck by lightning and killed, can he not be decently lifted from the wrack and rubbish? *Is death a crime?*"

The man significantly uttered, "That's about it, Miss."

Dick and Edith had withdrawn to a remote part

of the room, and in low tones were engaged in conversation. Edith had imparted to Dick the fact that the strange man lying dead beside his uncle was Count De La Rue. Dick's face worked in a violent emotion. It was the hinting at an unpleasant revelation that stirred him to the heart's core. Edith was also perceptibly agitated. To her recollection came unbidden glints of the conversation she had but held a few days previous with Mr Severance.

Shuffling of heavy feet, and a murmur of voices in the hall, betokened the arrival of the coroner, his secretary, the doctor, and other requisite officers of the law necessary to institute an inquest.

Dick induced Clarisse to leave the room, accompanied by Edith. It would be a very hard ordeal if it had been proper for her to witness the unfeeling, matter-of-fact investigation during the autopsy. And more terrible, certainly, than all the rest, would it have been for her to hear the corroborative or opposing evidences, deduced from circumstances in lieu of the testimony of witnesses.

Primâ facie, without doubt, the house had been struck by lightning, the charred tracks made by the serpentine passage of the fiery electric fluid were traceable from its entrance to its exit. Satisfactory so far. Very well. The bodies were facing each other and impurpled on opposite sides, evidencing that the two men had been seated opposite one another in front of the desk, and must have

been simultaneously killed by the same flash. . . . A photograph of the room was taken for future reference. Afterwards, the bodies were laid upon the two long planks the deputy had placed upon the undertaker's rests for the autopsy.

Meanwhile, the legal ferret set to work on the correlative evidences, making a full detailed inventory. . . . A half-melted Nuremburg silver casket, containing a conglomeration of partially-fused jewellery, showed the fatal conductor of the lightning. In Mr Severance's stiffened hand was clasped a metal paper weight that was blackened by the electric fluid. The bodies of the two men had fallen in such wise that when found Mr Severance had tumbled upon the stranger, and the paper weight had caused an ugly abrasion of his temple. The coroner, upon the doctor's sworn opinion, was perfectly satisfied as to the accidental cause of death in both cases, and the same was duly certified.

The query as to what business the men had been engaged in transacting, or what brought them so secretly together at that hour of the night, was a matter for another branch of the law, and in no way concerned him.

The papers found in the paletot of the stranger indicated, if not actually proved, him to be a Count De La Rue. After a brief consultation with the family, who repudiated any claim for their consideration, it was decided that the stranger's body should be removed, as soon as consistent with the

requirements of the law, to the public mortuary, to await further action on the part of his own relatives or authorised persons.

Mr Severance's body received immediate care.

At the suggestion of Mr Bleecker a thorough search was instituted to see if there might be any personal private papers about the room that had escaped observation. This delicate office was entrusted to Edith. She found the note written to Count De La Rue by Mr Severance, making an engagement for this very night.

"How strange," she thought, "both men dead; were they now likely to hold the rendezvous?" And she recalled the belief promulgated by many that spirits of human beings lurk where they may chance to have embarked for "that bourne whence no traveller returns," at least for the space of four and twenty hours.

"I cannot but feel there is a mystery here," she said to herself, as she pocketed the document, resolved not to produce it unless it went for something vital in exoneration of the dead.

The charred fragments in the paper-basket attracted the attention of Jones, who was so used to his master's methodical ways. His thoughts immediately turned to ponder on this deviation of custom. He wondered, "What, under the sun, ever made the mastur du sich a disorderly trick," then, as if such speculation was out of his province, "Well, faith and it's no the loiks o' me that should be a-criticosizing the loiks o' he. If the mastur

done it, I'll bet me Sunday boots on't 'tis the rightest and the properest thing for any gentulman in the land to do." This summing up of faithful Jones was a tribute to his late master, creditable alike to master and servant.

Hours of unspeakable grief attended the primary state of stolidity which had braced Clarisse up so bravely. Dick nobly tried to comfort her, withal he likewise was profoundly grieved by the personal loss he experienced. His uncle was his sole relative, excepting Clarisse. They were particularly knit together by the oneness and unity of their affliction, endeared by the pitiless desolation of their supreme sorrow.

Clarisse, clinging to Dick, said, with heart-breaking pathos, "Dick, how suddenly our world has narrowed down to our two selves. Our claim on each other is a thousandfold more to-day than yesterday."

Dick's ensaddened face glowed with delight at her words.

"Such utterance, Clarisse, from you during this dire hour, is priceless to me. Believe me, my darling, it turns the poignant edge of sorrow to a great degree. Yes, beloved one, we will henceforth consecrate our love and our lives to each other."

Earnest, passionate Dick entertained an unspoken thought, namely—if the spirit of the beloved dead yet hovered about them, this avowal, genuine as it was, must be salutary to him and merit his sanction.

Yes, the supposed power of a spirit to read mortals' hearts must likewise accord his uncle the felicity of clearly interpreting all which was burning in his heart of hearts at this moment. Aye, he must likewise have known the supreme trial it was for Dick to have kept violent hands off the body of their arch-foe. De La Rue's corpse was clothed with none of death's sanctity, but seemed to Dick as the carcass of some abominable, dehumanized monster, which should have been cast as carrion into a sewer, to rot with other mizen.

Strange, wondrous strange, that out of all the world, these two men were struck by death at the same time. What hideous juggling of fate. . . . Dick was not superstitious, but the extraordinary coincidence tended to excite an uncanny line of speculation. . . . He was deeply concerned lest his uncle had not taken the precaution to destroy, or place beyond the haphazard of falling into Clarisse's hands, his wife's confession,

Time dragged slowly, as if weighted down by chain and ball. He was anxious, for Clarisse's sake, to end as quickly as forms and ceremonies permitted, the dismal wretchedness of holding vigils beside the inanimate form, which had so recently been athrill with life, which had enshrined a soul of lofty mould, which had been possessed of that essence of intelligence, that imparted individuality and character, which had been imbued with affection, abnegation, nobility, and which had typified an exalted order of manhood, now—now, but a lifeless, insensitive object, from which had flown,

without warning, without an adieu, the beloved spirit. Lips silenced for ever and ever.

Cold, bitter, inexorable, implacable Death! Iconoclast! Destiny! thou hast no favourite whom thou sparest; thou holdest back not one solitary pang, when a dearly beloved falls into thy merciless clutches. To one and all thou art cruel impartially; to one and all thy visitations are unwelcome. Let mortals expect and watch thy coming, years or hours, thy arrival is ever a dread surprise. Every hand is lifted to stay thy progress. Though in fits of human suffering, the immunity thou canst dispense hast been frequently supplicated, the cry is ever and anon, at thy approach, "Avaunt, Death! not yet! not yet!" Thy secrecy, thy impenetrableness maketh mortal heart quail. Thou seemest to hold the key to eternity; but the unconscious moment exacted in dissolution, to unloose the earthy trammels of the soul, is veiled in an awful mystery. What mortal, in honesty, when the brain is lucid, can say, "I dread thee not at all"?

Clarisse had never previously seen death. To her the horror of the inevitable hopelessness and helplessness with which she was compelled to submit to her loss, crushed her. She found herself in a scared, timid way, shrinking from the lifeless form. It was so cold! It was so dumb! An undefinable recoiling tempted her to flee from the body of one who had but yesterday embodied all she held most

dear, most loveable on earth. . . . Then came the fierce irrational resentment against the Supreme Power, the internal upbraidings, the unwarrantable questioning why her father, who had been the pattern of excellence, the type of nobility, should be thus stricken down, whilst scores of less worthy individuals were permitted enjoyment of life and well-being? Her "*why this*" and "*why that*" fell back unanswered upon her distraught soul.

"Dick," she said with a sense of shame, much confused and distressed, "I am such a coward, I shrink with actual fear from being left alone in the room with *that—that*"—She pointed towards the casket containing her father's body, giving way to an access of spasmodic weeping.

"Yes, I understand, Clarisse. The shock of this violent calamity, your unfamiliarity with death in any guise, affects you most unhappily. It is quite natural, my darling, but you must not grow morbid. You remember your father's frequent quotation, '*There's nothing good or bad, but thinking on it makes it so.*' Well, soon we must make a change of scene, and in our new life, as time jogs on, learn to accept our loss, and feel that nothing is such an affliction it cannot be assuaged by time and fresh happiness." Dick's philosophy was given with ill-grace, for his own heart was in revolt.

"A while ago, Dick," she said between gasping sobs, "I was arranging a trifling detail of father's toilet, just as I always have. I begged, I prayed with fervour that he should return—give me some sign

—some word of recognition—a last token of love.” She wildly looked behind her, greatly perturbed. “*Dick, Dick*, would you believe it, after my supplication I was struck with fear lest my behest might be granted! I was palsied—the thought flashed through my brain, such a miracle would kill me! Dick, the pallid icy feature seemed to soften and relax. A quiver seemed to stir the eyelids! Oh! Dick! Dick! I am afraid! I am afraid!”

Suddenly, with remarkable nerve she stifled her sobs, dried her eyes, held herself in silence a moment, to acquire self-control and steady her force. Then, with the marvellous resignation great grief often develops in an instant in the frailest, most timid natures, she approached the casket, lifted the napkin from her father’s face, took a single rose from the profusion of flowers strewn about him without formal arrangement. She kissed the flower passionately, then slipped it with lovingness into the palm of his hand, and softly kissed the marbled forehead, and turning towards Dick, signed her wish to leave the room.

“Thank God,” she said with sweet submission, “now it is all over. I do not wish to look upon him again.”

Child-woman that she was, she now experienced for her bereavement a degree of reconciliation she had struggled royally to achieve, and she did not dare tempt herself to fresh irresolution.

Strong in her conviction of her personal weakness, she appeared to armour herself in uncalled-for

fortitude. Worldly carpers said, "Of course she had not the keen attachment for her father she would have had if reared by him. Her grief is only moderate, will blow over in a month." Others said, "What can you expect? she was an adopted daughter." And yet others, "She's a born actress. Hasn't an atom of heart."

She was utterly ignorant of these invidious comments—which, had she known, would not have ruffled her conscientiousness a particle. She knew her own heart, and was far above the criticisms of outsiders. She scorned all these. Her sorrow was her own. This was one of her inherited qualities cropping out, exemplified by her father.

Obviously, it was far better to make the funeral absolutely private at an unseasonable hour, and thus avoid notoriety or a display of grief.

All of Mr Severance's ideas, which he had frequently expatiated upon at length, respecting the desirability of simplicity in funerals, were as far as practicable carried out.

A settled acceptance had come to these bereft ones, when an official order was brought by a deputy coroner, stating in substance that De La Rue's body must be brought back to the house, and Mr Severance must not be buried until a second coroner's inquest, which would convene at nine o'clock the next morning.

This was indeed terrible to submit to without remonstrance.

"What does it mean, Dick?" Clarisse asked

in consternation. "Do you think there is any reason to suspect—oh! no, no, it cannot be!" Some hideous idea possessed Clarisse. She felt she must make her struggle all over. How bitter.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE VERDICT.

“ It must appear
That malice bears down truth.”

THE stark corpses of foe and foe, were placed once more side by side. A thorough, regular medical and legal examination of all the facts and conditions had been made for the second time. There remained only the cross-questioning of certain interested persons before the jury entered a verdict.

The closed doors were opened, and all were admitted to the coroner's inquest who chose to come, for the law allowed of no privacy.

All eyes were scrutinisingly directed towards Clarisse. She evinced such a degree of fright and perturbation, her grief became secondary. This was a suspicious fact, taken in connection with the French Consul's note to the coroner, the accusatory tenor of which was the cause of the present reinvestigation—an unusual and questionable legal procedure, submitted to by the family through utter ignorance of the law in its integrity.

The French Consul had deposed that he was in possession of documentary evidence, that Count

De La Rue apprehended a mortal encounter the very night of the tragic occurrence, and that he (the Consul), despite the lightning episode, strongly suspected that some member of Mr Severance's family was cognizant of the nature of the feud, and should be cross-examined. However, he challenged the first hasty verdict.

After due administration of the usual oath, the coroner turned upon Clarisse abruptly, and demanded rather than asked :

"Miss Severance, have you any reason to imagine that Mr Severance, your father, and Count De La Rue had cause for an altercation upon the night of the calamity ?"

She hesitated, and glanced enquiringly at Dick, whose countenance was blackened through rage. Observing this, before waiting for her answer the coroner accosted Dick sharply :

"Perhaps, later on, sir, you may have an undisputed opportunity to give your testimony; meanwhile, the court insists that the witnesses interrogated should not be prompted. Well, now, Miss Severance, the court awaits an answer to the question."

"What question?" she asked, as if awakening from a dream.

"My dear young lady, you must give the court your undivided attention. Do you know whether there was any reason to presuppose that these two gentlemen," he pointed to the corpses, "had any altercation the night of the disaster?" She

faltered an instant. "Do not hesitate, Miss, the question is simple. Do you, or do you not? Yes, or no?"

"I do not," she managed to reply.

"Miss Severance, then the court is to understand that you do not?"

"Sir, I do not," gasped Clarisse, racked by the brutal manner and fierce glare of the coroner, who delighted in torturing inexperienced witnesses, and confusing their testimony.

"Then, Miss Severance, the court is to understand that you have no knowledge of any personal unpleasantness between *these two gentlemen*?" He pointed again at the two bodies, as he uttered with a taunting undercurrent of doubt, "do, or do you not know?" He bent his eyes more fixedly than heretofore upon Clarisse with a cruel, hard suspicion.

The poor child trembled violently. Her face gradually assumed the palor and rigidity of the dead. Her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, and after a futile effort to speak, she shook her head. This act aroused the bullying spirit of the officer of the law, who was so accustomed to crime. He was callous to all the delicate feelings experienced by refined natures in calamitous affliction. He was like a bloodhound on the scent of a refugee from the law. Without respect to person or circumstance, during an inquest everybody present was *a suspect* to him. He had always difficulty from convicting alike the victim and the guilty. Again he glowered at her.

"Miss Severance, your useless evasion will not spare you. In fulfilment of my sworn duties, I must insist upon an immediate and straightforward out-and-out answer. Do you, or do you not know of any personal disagreement between *these two gentlemen?*" He drew his dirty forefinger across the brows of both of the corpses, inured to death and more of a legal butcher than aught else. Man's, beast's, or bird's flesh was the same to him.

Clarisse involuntarily rose at his act of desecration, when his finger trailed across her father's forehead. She looked the personification of defiance, holding up her hands to stay off a recurrence of his offensive act.

"*Sir, I know nothing, nothing,*" she emphatically retorted.

"Ahem!" he cleared his throat, "Ahem! we are getting to the bottom of this matter." Clarisse swayed on her feet; even he was touched by her appearance, and said, "Don't stand, Miss Severance."

She sat down. Her eyes burned like coals of fire; the violet circles were extending far down over her ghastly cheeks. She felt herself to be drifting out of herself. Her heart seemed clasped and iron-bound, in the conscious horror of the accursed oath she had exacted from her father. "My God, pity me," she murmured to herself. "Oh, if some one would only speak to me—touch me." Then came the tormentor's last twist of the rack.

"Miss Severance," he bawled out, "having

taken your oath,"—this word was like a sword of fire slashing her brain,—“I must remind you that perjury is one of the greatest offences against the law.” A murmur of discontent floated over the assembled persons, at which the coroner lowered his eyebrows in a black frown, testily saying, “I must insist upon the strict observance of the requirements of decorum during this inquest.”

These words were no sooner spoken, than a gentleman arose. He was the former law partner of Mr Severance, and his legal adviser at the time of his death—a well-known district attorney, of high repute.

“Mr Coroner, in compliance with law,” he said, in a dignified, severe manner, “I must likewise *insist* that my client, Miss Severance, is not on trial for a criminal offence. Moreover, under existing circumstances, you are overstepping the province of your office, to ply Miss Severance with such questions.” Then turning to Clarisse, “Miss Severance, you will decline any further answers, unless I authorise you to the contrary.” He crossed the room and sat down beside her, as if to back her up should she weaken. She was grateful, to the innermost depths of her being.

The coroner, somewhat flustered, yet knowing he was supreme at these inquests, retorted savagely, “Mr Thoroughgood, my chief judicial business in this inquest is to find out how these two gentlemen came to their death. The house was struck by lightning, and there are distinct marks

of the tracks of the electric fluid on Mr Severance's person,—*indisputable traces*; but, Mr Thoroughgood, *unfortunately*,"—he kept matching the tips of his outstretched fingers, bending his hands far back, at the same time throwing his elbows outwards, as he reiterated, more emphatically and more superciliously than at first,—"*unfortunately*, Mr Thoroughgood, we find upon Count De La Rue's head," he now bent over the Frenchman's corpse, and touched the contused, empurpled spot, "*here* is a mortal fracture, evidently produced by a paper-weight, found clutched in Mr Severance's hand, *and not* by the lightning. Therefore, sir, in behalf of law and justice, it is this court's duty to investigate and judge as to the rights of the case. Moreover, there are certain suspicions of *foul play*, which we propose to sift to the bottom."

This was like a bomb suddenly exploding. Every one started. Mr Thoroughgood rose instantly to his feet.

"Mr Coroner, gentlemen of the jury, in behalf of my client, Miss Severance, I ask, how came Count De La Rue in Mr Severance's house after midnight? Why did he enter, like a thief, the back way? Why did he carry a dagger? Finally, what means the open casket, and jewels strewn in disorder over the floor? If Count De La Rue violently or stealthily effected an entrance into Mr Severance's private domain, and an encounter ensued, the law says, without quibble,"—he crossed the room,

and took a book from the mantel-shelf, where he had evidently taken the precaution to deposit it, and opened it to a marked place, and read : “Stephen’s Commentaries,” vol. iv. pages 50 and 51—“*If any person attempts the robbery or murder of another, or attempts to break open a house in the night time, and shall be killed in such attempt, either by the party assaulted or the owner of the house, or the servant attendant upon either, or by any person present, interposing to prevent mischief, the slayer shall be acquitted and discharged.*” He closed the book. “Hence, admitting the hypothesis that Mr Severance inflicted a mortal blow upon *that man*, he did so in self-defence. The law justifies him. And yet, again, the evidence given by the French Consul, proves beyond contravention that Count De La Rue premeditated—mildly speaking—a perilous encounter ; whereas, there has been nothing deduced from that, or other evidence in the case, to show that Mr Severance contemplated violence, or was cognizant of Count De La Rue’s scheme. However, as both the would-be plaintiff and defendant lie dead, and there are no eye-witnesses to the fatal disaster, I must insist, for *common decency*, as well as for *law and justice*, that the testimony of the medico-legal authority be taken as final, and the verdict be left to the jury.” Thus concluding, he sat down, the object of eternal gratitude of all persons concerned, save the legal martinet.

With ill-concealed temper the coroner rapidly glanced about the room, until his searching eyes lit upon the medico-legal expert in question.

"Doctor Clark, the court and jury await your testimony." Then in a tone maliciously servile, "As we are a body of *honest* but unscientific men, pray testify as clearly and untechnically as possible what your autopsy goes to prove as to the probability that one of these bodies bears the marks of lightning"—then triumphantly looking at Mr Thoroughgood—"and the other does *not*, *but* with a mark of violence upon his temple;" he glared upon his opponent, repeating, "*A mark of violence*, resulting from a murderous blow sufficient to have caused death, and produced by an implement remaining in the other man's—the assailant's—hands?"

This outrageous attempt to warp the doctor's evidence, and stamp upon the jurymen's minds the verdict that *he*, their chief, *desired*, incited an audible murmur against one so prostituting the functions of his office.

All eyes were quickly centred upon the doctor. He rose unhesitatingly, stepped forward, and took the usual oath without losing an unnecessary moment. His appearance in itself imparted to all present, before he uttered a word, a surety that he, at least, would give a fair, scientific opinion, unbiased by any such legal suspicions or preconceived bearings, *pro* or *con*, in deviation from the facts in the case as that voiced by the coroner.

“Mr Coroner, gentlemen of the jury. The subtlety of the electric fluid, its eccentric and swift deflections from its main course before being spent in a full discharge, are well known to every investigator of the subject. Albeit, unaccounted for by our present limit of science, they remain nevertheless incontrovertible facts. After a full and complete examination made by myself and colleagues at the autopsy upon the two subjects, I unhesitatingly pronounce that there can be *no doubt* that Mr Severance was struck dead by lightning. From his posture, evidently he was standing when smitten, whereas Count De La Rue was either about to rise, or about to sit down. The *concussion*, caused by the electric fluid as it shot through Mr Severance’s body, following some law of deflection, also occasioned Count De La Rue’s instantaneous death, and was conducted through the floor to the basement.”

Every one was wrapt in breathless attention, hanging upon every word this man uttered.

“The fracture of Count De La Rue’s cranium, without the slightest extravasation of blood in or about the wound, *proves conclusively* it was fortuitously inflicted after or at the time of death by the paper-weight found in Mr Severance’s hand, as he fell forward upon Count De La Rue likewise stricken. I may say the discoloration upon his head resembles other discolorations upon various parts of the bodies of both subjects, and has no special significance. There is no violence indicated in the

muscles of the arm of Mr Severance. Had he been guilty of a murderous assault at the moment of his calamity, the rigidity of the tendons, the gathered hardness of the muscular tissues would have been visible immediately after death, when the autopsy was made. There is no surmise in these well-established conditions. Therefore, Mr Coroner, gentlemen of the jury, on my oath, I solemnly before God pronounce the death of Mr Severance and Count De La Rue to have been simultaneous, and caused by lightning."

An expression of satisfaction was audibly emitted from every lip, save from the piqued coroner.

Clarisse threw her arms up, exclaiming:

"Thank God!"

No one stirred. All awaited the ominous charge of the coroner to his jury.

"Gentlemen of the jury, you have heard the evidence and testimony in this inquest, what is your verdict?"

The foreman arose, after the jury spent a few moments in deliberation.

"Your honour, we pronounce on our oath, before God and man, to our best knowledge and belief, a verdict of instantaneous and simultaneous death, caused by lightning in the case of Mr Severance, and likewise in the case of Count De La Rue."

The court was dismissed. The people went their way. All restrictions were removed. The coroner sent Count De La Rue's body to the city mortuary to await instructions from the French Consul.

Mr Severance's little family, including Edith, crushed by their calamitous affliction, were, despite the verdict, dumbly overpowered with their tacit suspicion that one had, in avenging, been summoned instantly red-handed to that highest Tribunal. Silent in their convictions, yet they were bound as by some inviolable oath to one another to guard their terrible suspicion mutely for ever.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MARRIAGE.

“ So be it ! Perish Babel ! Arise Babylon !
From ruins like these rise the fanes that shall last,
And to build up the future Heaven shatters the past.”

SPEEDY arrangements were being made to inter Mr Severance privately the next morning. Edith and Mrs Bleecker, after an earnest conference, decided, in consequence of the concatenation of affairs, as well as the shock they dreaded reaction would bring to Clarisse, and, more than all, her aloneness, to urge upon her and Dick an immediate marriage. No one could deem such action other than wise. It would put an end to the unconscionable rumours that would fly hither and thither like feathers in a whirlwind, and stick with the tar of aspersion in spite of truth.

Dick must henceforth be Clarisse's refuge. The precious chance, the one grain of hope denied her poor mother, fate kindly dropped in her balance. He would shelter her from the rough winds of a cruel world. He would be her invincible stronghold, naught should ever tempt her to forsake. From the abyss of their present affliction they would climb, step by step, arm in arm, to the

heights. They would seek to live in earnest, bearing their fardels as bravely as though robes of cloth of gold, apart from the purposeless fangled-world of humbuggery.

Above in that room where Clarisse had so short a time before flown to get away from the phantoms of her vagaries to the arms of the dearly beloved father, crept she now alone—alone, to hold a last solemn communion with all that remained of her revered father.

Poor child, she once more shrank with dread and horror from the helpless, harmless, pallid object that but yesterday was her grand, glorious father; now, now, heaven help her, was that cold, stark, clammy, unimpersonalized thing, she again feared to approach.

She felt overawed, but why? Great God, bend down from on high, and breathe into mortals' hearts some solution for this nameless revulsion. Teach human creatures, bereft of those beloved, that in the transition from life to death, there can be no sudden unloosing of incarnate, awful horrors. It passeth human ken. The sensible rational being, filled with the robust vigour, the power of life, crows down with an irresistible shrinking before the insensible, cold, marbled corpse, soulless, lifeless, speechless, but so appalling!

Suddenly Clarisse, in her bewilderment, through some allurements from an invisible source, recalled an old fable of a king whose army was slaughtered

mercilessly, and vanquishment impended, when an elf visited his dreams, saying, "Sire, do not despise me, but make me thy prime minister, and I'll conquer thy enemies," the king with scorn replied, "Avaunt pretender! Conquer thou mine enemies, and to thee I'll give my crown." "Sire, thy crown would crush me! I ask but to be as thy sceptre. Sire, thou art noble and most kingly, with majesty of mien, but alack-a-day! I, sire, I am the sneaking demon yclept Fear!"

The king consented. The elf caused all the dead warriors to be arrayed in solid phalanxes, in act of wielding with stiffened gory arms, battle-axes, and spears. The enemy's forces dashed upon the seemingly uprisen foe. Ceaselessly they charged; spent their strength as they bore down upon the invincible warriors, but the spectre warriors unshaken, stood like a granite wall. Finally the enemy stole up, peered 'neath the invincibles' helmets, into their glassy eyes, fell down aghast conquered by *Fear*! Easy captives through superstition to the king and his eldritch prime minister.

This seemed to comfort her. She thought it is nought but fear of the unknown intimidates me. It is, as it were, the standing on the border of *terra incognita*, and having the impassable barrier dropped before you. No one can wrest the *open sesame* from those who have passed beyond. . . . It is a thing, not of the volition, but the unavoidable sweep of Death's scythe. Helpless, hopeless mortality, ye must have faith. The bereft heart is

chill, and rent by the loss when once it realises its bereavement. The death-lock so fastly set upon loving lips—the lull of the pulses—the slipping out of that intangible sovereign called the mind, the spirit, the soul, that essence of personality, whatsoever you will—the void inevitably made by the extinguishment of life—the shrouded mystery Plato reasoneth about—the incomprehensible, no one has absolutely solved—puts the living soul in pillory till the attrition of time does its work of assuagement.

Clarisse had yesterday thought this struggle all ended. Events had conspired otherwise. Now she prayed for fresh strength, for fresh courage. Her heart in sorrow was eloquent with upraised, inarticulate outreachings to the Almighty. Finally she became used to the solemn hush of the room. She stole beside the casket in which reclined the body of her father. Divested of the hideous sheet, there his noble form, calm, peaceful, dignified, manly, in his own garb, as though wan and weary he just slept. The terror lifted from her. Her sorrow became pre-eminent. She knelt and grasped the cold hands, inclined her head upon the stalwart breast, wept not, but mused in strange wise.

“This, then, beloved father, is my retribution for exacting that dreadful vow. Oh, how could heaven thus take you from me. I dreamed to bring you blessings, to make you supremely happy; all now so cruelly blighted. Oh, my God! Oh, my God!

What can I do to show my penitence?" The flood-gates of grief were opened; she sobbed and sobbed convulsively, till her spent nature sank once more into meditative silence. Her girlhood was of the past, she had entered the domain of womanhood.

The door opened gently and Dick entered, the personification of manly grief. He had been struck hard—too hard to moan. He stepped up to Clarisse, and lifted her tenderly from her kneeling posture, held her in his arms, her upturned face enfolded to his breast, looked deep, fairly, searchingly into her eyes, and asked in earnest accents:

"Clarisse, do you love me all in all?"

"Dick, Dick, my father is gone; I love nobody but you."

"Well, my poor, bereaved girl, let us try to rise above our unhappy desolation. Let us make our lives what *he* had hoped we should." He considered silently a few moments, then spoke out fearlessly, "Clarisse, my darling, I want you to consent to be married to-night, by *father's* side." She shuddered, and instinctively drew back. "Yes, Clarisse, with our hands in his, as though he pronounced a benediction upon us."

"Oh, Dick, Dick! that seems too awful!"

"No, Clarisse. Just think how blessed would be our union if he had been spared to give us one to the other. Then, darling, think how blessed to have these dear, noble hands,"—he bent over his uncle's form, and kissed passionately the pallid

hands bathed by his splashing tears,—“ his hands, perform this last office for us, whom he loved above all else. It will soften our heart-break pain. Say yes, Clarisse.”

“ Yes, Dick, I say yes. I seem to feel his presence. I am resigned.”

Kingston, Mr and Mrs Bleecker, and Edith entered the room in attendance upon the Rev. Edward Judson, who pronounced the marriage service in a manner impressive and enhallowed.

When the clergyman said, “ Who gives this woman to this man ? ”

Clarisse stepped up to her father's body, took both his hands in hers, and answered, “ *My father, which art in Heaven.* ”

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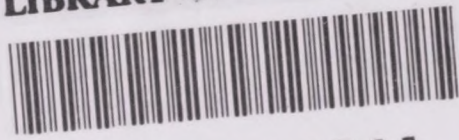
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